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Films, popular media, and even literacy scholars (see Heath, Finders, Gere, and Gee) persistently portray teachers in classrooms. My project draws attention to teachers who educate in spaces that are simultaneously home and school: homeschooling parents who teach their own children, a group largely ignored in rhetoric and composition scholarship. Homeschooling offers parents a degree of instructional control that permits them to organize language instruction around key values, such as religious or moral beliefs. However, many homeschooling parents are also pressured to recognize the limits of their control as they anticipate a point at which students will experience writing instruction outside the home. Because they are non-specialists preparing their children for the specialized writing instruction they will receive in college, homeschooling parents engage in an imaginative construction of college writing and also reorder their teaching practices toward this future end. They control instruction and create these projections in different ways – most often through writing curricula, group writing courses, and discussions with other homeschoolers. I examine how homeschooling parents negotiate literacies in spaces that are simultaneously home and school to propose that writing instructors can better teach writing if they acknowledge the many types of literacies and expectations for these that teachers and students bring with them to the classroom.

BLURRING THE LINES: TEACHING LITERACIES IN HOME/SCHOOL SPACES

by

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## DEDICATION

To my family and friends. Without their support, this project would not be complete.

Take luck!

## APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Courtney Adams Wooten has been approved by the following committee of Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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## PREFACE

My own interest in how homeschoolers learn to write sprang from my experiences as a student homeschooled from first through twelfth grades. In that time, I studied grammar, wrote stories and short essays, read many books (even telling my mother that I couldn't find anything good to read at the library because I'd read all the good books), and took first-year composition courses as a dual enrollment student at a local community college in my junior and senior years of high school. My mother primarily taught my five siblings and I at home while my dad worked and assisted whenever he could. My parents turned to homeschooling for a variety of reasons, some economic – they couldn't afford to send all of us to private school – and some personal – their own mediocre public school experiences and Protestant beliefs made them want a better education for their children. In many ways we fit the typical mold of a homeschooling family: white, large, and Protestant. However, my time as a homeschooled student showed me that there are many homeschoolers who don't fit into this mold and whose motivations for homeschooling are often different from my family's.

When I began studying rhetoric and composition, I was intrigued by the many groups of students discussed in literacy scholarship and writing studies scholarship. Notably, I saw that there was very little understanding of homeschooled students: who they are and what they have learned about writing. Therefore, I struck out in this dissertation project to explore what homeschoolers are learning about writing and what this can tell rhetoric and composition scholars about literacy practices and writing

instruction. When I was homeschooled, my parents didn't use any of the writing curricula mentioned in this project, participate in writing courses in cooperatives, or join online homeschool forums – largely because these were unavailable in the 1990s and early 2000s when I was in school. The homeschooling movement has grown and with it have the ways that homeschooling parents can provide writing instruction to their students. This project sheds light on some of these writing instruction methods, asking us to further consider what this research says about homeschooling parents as non-specialist instructors of writing and, more generally, about how non-specialist writing instructors, including postsecondary instructors often largely untrained in writing instruction, learn to teach writing.

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CHAPTER I

FROM GOAT-HERDING TO HARVARD: HOMESCHOOLERS TAKE THEIR  
LITERACIES TO COLLEGE

As a freshman at Harvard, students teased Grant Colfax as a bumpkin ‘goat boy’ whose resumé included raising goats and studying trigonometry by kerosene lamp. But campus life has changed this year for the 19-year-old sophomore who came East to the Ivy League campus from a backwoods northern California home where mom and dad were his teachers. (Seagrave)

Thus began a story released by the Associated Press about Grant Colfax, a homeschooled young man who in 1983 went to Harvard and became a media sensation. Prior to this story, homeschooling was a little-known phenomena that was often characterized as abnormal and even damaging. With the story of Colfax (and, in succeeding years, his brothers Reed and J. Drew who also attended Harvard<sup>1</sup>), people across the country were introduced to a homeschooler who had grown up in an unconventional home and made it into one of the most prestigious universities in the nation. Seagrave describes what seems like a primitive home in California without electricity until the year Grant Colfax went to college. In order to homeschool, Colfax’s parents – his father a former professor of sociology and his mother a former high school English teacher – “won approval from the state to educate the children at home” (Seagrave). What Colfax and his siblings couldn’t learn from his parents they learned from textbooks and experience. In order to prove to Harvard that “he could handle

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<sup>1</sup> See Nahm.

formal academic work, Colfax took 18 units of classes one semester at Santa Rosa Junior College” where he earned straight As (Seagrave). The Harvard admissions officer who interviewed Colfax, Robert Cashion, considered him ““someone who really enjoyed the learning process”” (Seagrave). The reception Colfax initially received at Harvard was not welcoming; at one point during his first year, classmates threw snowballs at him and yelled, ““There goes the goat boy”” (Seagrave). Nevertheless, by the time Seagrave wrote this story one year later, Colfax had started to fit in and most of the teasing had ended. Colfax had introduced people to homeschoolers and to their potential for academic achievement once they moved outside of the home, even into the nation’s most prestigious universities. Homeschoolers weren’t simply anomalies any longer; they were candidates for college success.

Thirty years later, homeschoolers are less likely to cause such media flurry. Although scholarly and popular information about homeschoolers is still undeveloped and sometimes stereotypical, homeschooling itself is not as irregular. Most people are familiar with the homeschooling movement, even if only through popular media representations such as the Gornicke family in the movie *RV* who live on a camping site. Though interest in homeschoolers continues, the act of homeschooling itself is unlikely to draw as much attention as the Colfaxes. In 2012, the *New York Times* printed seven stories about homeschoolers ranging from stories about homeschoolers’ bids for play on public high school sports teams to museums building partnerships with homeschoolers to parents’ reasons for homeschooling.<sup>2</sup> Many continue to debate the merits of

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<sup>2</sup> See Longman, Weiner, and Russell.

homeschooling, but there is less disbelief about homeschooling in general and the abilities, academic and otherwise, of homeschooled students than in 1984.

One of the more interesting aspects of the accounts of the Colfax brothers is the focus on the children. Information about how their parents homeschooled them is minimal. Grant Colfax told reporters that his parents' backgrounds as teachers meant that he and his siblings learned primarily through "projects" and that the subjects his parents couldn't teach were learned through textbooks (Seagrave). However, the Colfax parents don't speak for themselves in these news stories; instead, they are primarily known through him. Today, the public stakes of choices homeschooling parents make about their children's education often take center stage in stories about homeschooling and are part of debates about the mission of education generally. Education as it is conceived in traditional schools, both K-12 and postsecondary, is a public mission to some extent, even if schools are not affiliated with the state (i.e. private schools). Homeschooling parents take this public mission and privatize it, moving K-12 education into their homes to a degree not seen with most other forms of schooling. When they do so, critics such as Michael Apple question the impact of homeschooling on public education.<sup>3</sup> He claims in "The Cultural Politics of Home Schooling," "[i]t is not possible to understand the growth of home schooling unless we connect it to the history of the attack on the public sphere in general and on the government (the state) in particular" (263). One problematic effect of homeschooling, he claims, is the withdrawal of homeschoolers from the public sphere to

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<sup>3</sup> See also Reich and Lubienski.

the detriment of other participants, particularly the underprivileged.<sup>4</sup> Apple envisions parents' decision to educate children at home as their withdrawal from participation in a democratic state in which all citizens join together for a common good. Viewing homeschooling in this way entails seeing homeschooling parents' choices as designed to remove their children from the public sphere entirely.

Contrary to this perspective, homeschooling parents often conceive of their decision to homeschool as a way to raise better citizens who can more fully participate in the public sphere. Measuring civic engagement or participation in the public sphere is difficult if not impossible, especially given that not everyone would agree on a definition of this engagement. However, a 2003 survey of over 7,300 adults who had previously been homeschooled found that 71% participated in an ongoing community service activity (such as coaching a sports team, volunteering in a school, or working with a church or neighborhood association) compared to 37% of U.S. adults of a similar age (HSLDA, "Homeschooling Grows Up," 6). This survey also found that more homeschoolers worked for a candidate or political cause, attended a public meeting, participated in a protest or boycott, or voted in a recent national/state election than other U.S. adults their age. All of these are signs of engagement with American society and politics that homeschooling parents cultivated in their children at home. A disconnect clearly exists between the ways Apple and homeschooling parents view the preparation of citizens: Apple believes children should learn to participate in the public sphere in a public arena whereas homeschooling parents believe children should have experiences

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<sup>4</sup> He posits that this occurs when schools receive less funding because they have smaller enrollments when homeschoolers don't attend public schools.

privately guided by their parents to prepare them for this participation. As A. Bruce Arai points out:

the broader issue of the place of homeschooling in contemporary democratic societies can be better understood as a more fundamental debate about the nature of citizenship, and the place of the school as a major agent of socialization in the construction of citizens. In short, most of the concerns about and objections to homeschooling are worries about whether homeschooled children will grow up to be good citizens. (n.p.)

Jürgen Habermas's theories of the public sphere are useful in further understanding the differences between these conceptualizations of education and the public sphere. He argues that the public sphere is crafted out of "the sphere of private people come together as a public" (27). Therefore, people inhabit both public and private spheres, including the family, which inform their participation in both: the personal is always public and the public is always personal. Homeschooling parents have not removed their children from the public sphere; instead, they have taken back the functions of "upbringing and education, protection, care, and guidance" that Habermas argues have increasingly been taken up by extrafamilial authorities (155). Critics of homeschooling claim that children must be partially brought up by society in order to participate in the public sphere; homeschooling parents claim that their children can better participate in society if their upbringing occurs in the home. Arai also points to evidence that homeschooling parents often make sure their children participate in activities outside of the home, suggesting that they "are keen to integrate into the wider society rather than pulling back from it" (n.p.). Different ideas about how to prepare for the public sphere may be an impasse impossible to bridge until evidence is presented that

definitively shows that one method works better than another. However, these draw attention to very different ways of thinking about education currently in circulation in the United States. The balance between the private and the public is always difficult. In education, where it has implications for children's lives and society's future, it is even more fraught.

The tensions between different views of children's education illustrates how homeschooling parents think differently about education than many, particularly in relation to their children's lives. Homeschooling, for them, is not an "attack on the public sphere" but is, instead, an attempt to reclaim the private sphere as equally important in the lives of citizens and as a valuable space in which children can "go to school." Understanding, or at least acknowledging, this point of view is necessary before engaging in further discussion about homeschooling parents and the choices they make when educating their children. Otherwise, it is very easy to slip into stereotypes of homeschooling parents who naively decide to keep their children at home without understanding the implications of this decision. In fact, discussions on online homeschooling forums reveal that most homeschooling parents are extremely cognizant of the impact of their educational decisions on their children's lives and concerned about the effects of these decisions on their children's futures.

One specific type of instruction that homeschooling parents provide, writing instruction, has not yet been discussed with depth in rhetoric and composition scholarship. This is not surprising given the K-12 nature of homeschooling and the focus

composition studies usually maintains on postsecondary writing experiences.<sup>5</sup> I argue that turning to the ways homeschooling parents provide writing instruction to their children offers several valuable insights for composition scholars. First, their negotiations of the private and the public in determining what and how to teach their children writing provides us with an in-depth analysis of how both of these spheres impact decisions that writing instructors make, a needed perspective because studies of writing instruction are often focused on students' negotiations of conflicting ideas rather than teachers'. Second, homeschooling parents' negotiations of the private and the public revolve around the issue of control and who is providing writing instruction to what ends, an issue always at stake when we teach writing in postsecondary environments. Finally, homeschooling parents tell us about processes that non-specialist writing instructors go through in order to learn how to teach writing. Homeschooling parents learn primarily through writing curriculum and conversations with others, sometimes turning to others to help teach their children writing. The first two moves are often ways that non-specialist teachers of writing in postsecondary institutions – including contingent faculty untrained in writing instruction – learn how to teach writing. My project's examination of homeschooling parents' writing instruction illuminates the complexities at work for teachers when teaching writing, particularly if they are untrained in writing pedagogies.

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<sup>5</sup> Notable exceptions include Brandt, Heath, Rose, Gee, and Goldblatt. Often, however, these scholars are viewed as education and/or literacy scholars broadly rather than as composition scholars specifically.

## **A Brief History of Homeschooling**

Before tracing the major threads of my argument, I offer this brief history of homeschooling in the United States. Understanding the roots of homeschooling and why it has become a modern grassroots movement is integral to understanding how current homeschooling parents fit into this history and are, in some ways, moving beyond it. Homeschooling families, who once fit into definite stereotypes, are now a more diverse group who have many reasons for homeschooling and many ways of envisioning their children's education. The one thing they agree on, however, is their belief that their children's education can be better undertaken at home than in public or private schools.

Some studies of homeschooling take a long view of this movement's history. Milton Gaither's *Homeschool: An American History* traces various kinds of home education that have taken place in the United States from the seventeenth century to the twenty-first century. Doing so allows him to outline the intersections of home and school from:

the colonial period when civil government aggressively *enforced* a certain sort of home education, to the slow and voluntary *eclipse* of home instruction by other institutions, then to the *antagonism* between home and schools that has been a hallmark of the homeschooling movement, and finally to an increasing *hybridization* of home and school today" (4).

This evolution revolves, for Gaither, around the different social meanings that home education in its various forms has been ascribed. I define contemporary homeschooling as an alternative to compulsory public education, which extends back to 1852 when Massachusetts enacted the first compulsory education law. All states had enacted



compulsory education laws by 1918,<sup>6</sup> but even before this time calls had been made for public education reform, perhaps most notably by John Dewey in *Democracy and Education* in 1916. Dewey connects home and school by describing links in knowledge formed in both spaces rather than seeing these as completely separate:

Since democracy stands in principle for free interchange, for social continuity, it must develop a theory of knowledge which sees in knowledge the method by which one experience is made available in giving direction and meaning to another . . . the connection of the acquisition of knowledge in the schools with activities, or occupations, carried on in a medium of associated life. (401)

Already Dewey was critical of the movement in public education to separate students from experiential learning, which some homeschoolers later sought to combat by educating their children at home. Dewey also asks exactly what children should be learning in schools, a question that all homeschoolers try to answer themselves rather than relying on traditional schools to dictate the answer. At this early stage of compulsory public education, Dewey marks an important beginning of discourse about what kinds of learning occur where and how home and school – in fact, all experiences in a person’s life – connect together.

Shortly after Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* was published, several legal cases in the 1920s set the stage for homeschooling to become a legal alternative to public and private schools.<sup>7</sup> There is no indication that Dewey’s thought directly impacted these cases, but he certainly brought to light tensions in the U.S. about public education that

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<sup>6</sup> Alaska, not yet a state, enacted compulsory education laws in 1929.

<sup>7</sup> These include *Meyer v. Nebraska* (Nebraska; 1923), *Pierce v. Society of the Sisters* (Oregon; 1925), and *Farrington v. Tokushige* (Hawaii (not yet a state); 1927).

appear in these cases. Such cases laid the groundwork for parental rights in the raising of their children and for private schools to be included in laws governing compulsory education. None definitively resulted in laws governing the legality of homeschooling, but they established the importance of the private sphere in raising children. These later provided a framework within which parents could argue that they have a right to educate their children at home in order to provide the best upbringing for their children.

In ten states,<sup>8</sup> homeschooling is still considered a form of private schooling, which has been acknowledged as a viable alternative to compulsory public education since the 1925 *Pierce vs. Society of the Sisters* case. The other forty states have separate laws governing homeschooling. Nevada became the first state to adopt homeschooling-specific statutes in 1947, almost forty years before any other state. The law has been modified since, but originally it provided exemption from the compulsory education law in the circumstance “That the child is receiving under private or public instruction, at home or in some other school, equivalent instruction fully approved by the state board of education as to the kind and amount thereof” (Schnorbus). Here, the law equivocates private and public instruction that occurs in the home or in schools, asking only that “equivalent instruction,” a vague indicator, be “approved by the state board of education.” Nevada’s laws, however vague, were the first opening of the door to homeschooling, defined as parents educating their children in the home, and the first time parents were given space to be schoolteachers to their own children. Nevada

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<sup>8</sup> Alabama, California, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Nebraska, Louisiana, Texas, and West Virginia (Home School Legal Defense Association, “Summary of Home School Laws”).

acknowledged that the private sphere could serve as an equally fruitful site of schooling as the public sphere.

Social and legal circumstances changed in the next forty years to spur the legal acceptance of homeschooling in other states. During the 1950s, public education came under fire with the publication of *Why Johnny Can't Read* by Rudolph Franz Flesch in 1955, an indictment of public schools' teaching of reading and a call for phonics instruction to help remedy this problem.<sup>9</sup> In addition, deficits in math and science learning in public schools were perceived after the Russians launched the *Sputnik I* in 1957, triggering a firestorm of fear and alarm that the U.S. would be overtaken by Russia. In the midst of these events, education reformers began to seek alternatives to the public school system that turned several of them, like Dewey, to the connections between home and school. Unlike Dewey, who sought reformation of the public education system, three reformers in particular, John Holt and Raymond and Dorothy Moore (a husband and wife team), offered schooling children at home as an alternative to public education. Dewey identified the need to transform public education because so many children attended public schools. Holt and the Moores each began their careers by advocating for the reform of public education but then posited that the public education system *writ large* was a failure and must, therefore, be appropriated by parents. When the public sphere

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<sup>9</sup> This publication is often noted by rhetoric and composition scholars as one of many incarnations of a perceived "literacy crisis." These continue today with variations on similar ideas such as Greg Toppo's "Why Johnny Still Can't Read" and other perceived literacy crises in Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa's *Academically Adrift* and Andrew Hackner and Claudia Dreifus's *Higher Education?*

fails to educate children, they believed children should be moved into their homes where parents could provide better schooling.

Holt provides a unique perspective to the early history of homeschooling because he worked as a public school teacher who explicated problems he saw in schools, first advocating for reform much as Dewey did but later declaring that such reform was unlikely and offering a particular version of homeschooling, unschooling, as an alternative. Holt's books *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn*, both published in 1964, provide observations of students in public schools. He argues that this system, rather than encouraging learning, produced children who could not learn "because they are afraid, bored, and confused" (*How Children Fail* 5). Both books conclude that the answer to this problem is to produce a different kind of school "where children learn what they most want to know, instead of what we think they ought to know" (*How Children Fail* 289). Holt acknowledges that this will require adults to "trust children as we ourselves were not trusted" (*How Children Learn* xiii) and to learn in our own ways through experience and self-guidance, but he claims that this will result in the best kind of learning for students that will stay with them rather than disappear before or after taking a test or writing a paper for a grade. In relation to reading, he particularly emphasizes the importance of allowing children to determine the pace at which they learn to read and the assistance they want throughout this process (*How Children Learn* 137). Holt does not necessarily look to homeschooling to provide this experience in these early books, seeking instead a reformation of the public school system. In 1983 additions to these books, however, he indicates that he does not believe such changes are possible and

argues that children should instead be homeschooled: “I no longer believe we can make schools into places in which all children grow in the ways described above” (*How Children Learn* xiv). To help support those who decided to homeschool, Holt began *Growing Without Schooling*, a groundbreaking and very popular homeschooling magazine that provided advice and support to homeschoolers from 1977-2001,<sup>10</sup> and wrote *Teach Your Own*, a book about homeschooling, in 1981.

Holt’s legacy lives on today most notably in groups of unschoolers, or those parents who allow children to control their own learning. This group is often viewed within the homeschooling community as distinct from homeschooling, which attempts to replicate traditional schooling in the home.<sup>11</sup> Although no estimates are given for the number of unschoolers, a 2007 U.S. Department of Education survey of homeschoolers found that 65% cited “nontraditional approach to child’s education” as one reason homeschooling parents chose to homeschool (NCES, *1.5 Million Homeschooled Students*, 2). This number does not directly correlate to unschoolers because homeschooling parents often identify their educational approach as “nontraditional.” However, only 7% cited a “nontraditional approach” as their most important reason, perhaps pointing to a more accurate approximation of how many homeschooling parents

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<sup>10</sup> According to a letter from Patrick Farenga et al. in the final issue of *GWS*, the publication had to end because it failed to generate revenue or to even break even. After his death in 1985, Holt’s estate supplemented the publication’s revenue from subscription fees to keep it alive. This was only possible until 2001, although Holt Associates continues to support the publication of books and archiving of Holt’s work.

<sup>11</sup> Notably, unschooling parents often participate in online forums and discussions separate from homeschooling parents. Unschoolers also identify themselves when they ask questions on general homeschooling websites so that readers and respondents understand that they are approaching homeschooling through a specific educational philosophy founded on children’s freedom to structure their own learning.

might be unschoolers because they identify this as their primary reason for homeschooling (NCES, *1.5 Millions Homeschooled Students*, 3). Unschoolers usually do not direct their children's education at all, providing assistance only when children ask for it. Unschooling has been alternatively lambasted because it can lead to children never learning anything school-related and praised because children can pursue learning in ways that they find meaningful (as Dewey pushed for in public education).<sup>12</sup> In this project, I focus on traditional homeschoolers both because this group is more prominent in terms of national support systems for their teaching and because unschoolers do not engage in teaching practices that are equivalent to those used in schools, including postsecondary institutions.<sup>13</sup>

For those homeschoolers engaging in traditional forms of home education, particularly Protestant homeschoolers, the “founding father” of the modern homeschooling movement is Raymond Moore. Religious homeschoolers form the largest and most visible segment of the homeschooling population. The 2012 U.S. Department of Education survey found that 64% of homeschooling parents cite “A desire to provide

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<sup>12</sup> See Grace Llewellyn's *Real Lives: Eleven Teenagers Who Don't Go to School Tell Their Own Stories* for both perspectives about unschooling told by unschooled children. The second edition of this book discusses children's experiences both while being unschooled and afterward in their adult lives. The experiences told range from a man who was once “virtually homeless” (Llewellyn 65) and now works as a webmaster for a credit union to a woman who has an MBA and works in product development. This book offers both negative and positive portraits of adults who were unschooled and leaves undetermined the efficacy of this method of learning.

<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that there isn't much to learn from unschoolers. In their embrace of a completely different style of education, unschoolers have much to offer composition studies about what teaching is and how it is undertaken. However, their lack of cohesion and organization into groups is a difficult obstacle to studying how unschooled children learn to write.

religious instruction” as one reason for homeschooling, yet only 16% cite this as the most important reason (NCES, *Parent and Family Involvement 2012*, 18). Therefore, religion does inform many homeschooling parents’ decisions to educate their children at home, even though homeschooling parents are not all Christian fundamentalists as they are often characterized.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, religious beliefs are not the only reason or even the most important reason many homeschooling parents decide to homeschool their children. For example, 91% of homeschooling parents cite “A concern about the school environment,” 77% cite “A desire to provide moral instruction,” and 74% cite “A dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools” for their decision to homeschool (U.S. Dept. of Education, NCES, *1.5 Million Homeschooled Students*, 2). The issue of who homeschools and why is, therefore, not easily generalized. For those who do engage in religious instruction or even for those who attempt to replicate traditional schooling at home, Moore’s ideas rather than Holt’s are the ancestral strands from which they weave a more traditional type of homeschooling.

Moore approaches schooling from a Protestant perspective while also focusing on how public schools affect young children, first publishing “The Dangers of Early Schooling” in *Harper’s Magazine* with his son Dennis Moore in 1972. In this article, as in his subsequent books *Better Late Than Early* and *Home Grown Kids* co-authored with his wife Dorothy Moore, the Moores argue that sending children to school before the age of eight inhibits their growth. Based on an overview of research studies, they contest

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<sup>14</sup> James C. Carper historically discusses religion and schooling – private, public, and at home – in “Pluralism to Establishment to Dissent,” positing that “conservative Christians are likely to be joined by increasing numbers of dissenters whose beliefs are rooted in other faith systems” (17).

educators' insistence that sending students to school at earlier ages could solve problems with their learning:

The child too often stumbles insecurely through kindergarten and the early grades. His friends who were delayed a year or so quickly catch up and pass him – and usually become more stable and highly motivated. His learning retention frequently remains lower than that of his later-starting peers, regardless of how bright he is. In other words, it is hard to escape the conclusion that early schooling is little short of crippling. (Moore and Moore, "The Dangers," 59)

The debilitating effects of young children attending schools is a point reiterated throughout other publications and that some readers of this article identified as a direct reaction to the *Sputnik* crisis (Gaither 131). Like Holt, the Moores do not immediately turn to homeschooling, at least beyond age eight, as a solution to this problem. The homeschooling population was quite small in the early 1970s, an estimated 10,000-15,000 (Gaither 142) and it was not consolidated as it is now. Calling for people to homeschool, as Holt eventually did, would have been viewed very skeptically. As more people began to express interest in homeschooling, however, the Moores extended their arguments beyond early childhood to children of all ages. They did so not by proclaiming, as Holt does, that children should take over their education but, instead, that parents should ultimately control what their children learn and how they are schooled. This form of schooling, homeschooling, is typically undertaken by parents who use curricula in order to teach their children school subjects such as writing, literature, grammar, math, science, and history at home, with children allowed varying degrees of independence from their parents as teachers. In other words, the Moores called for a movement of traditional schooling out of the public sphere of schools and into the private



sphere of the home with parents determining what children should learn, when, and how. For Holt, control of education should rest in children's hands. For Moore, parents replaced public school teachers and administrators in retaining control over their children's education.

Religion was also a factor in a landmark legal case, this time directly addressing homeschooling, that occurred in 1972. *Wisconsin v. Yoder* resulted in the decision that the Amish have the right to educate their children on their own after the eighth grade because the high school environment would violate their religious beliefs. The legal system acknowledged the importance of religious beliefs and how these private beliefs often contradicted the education children receive in public schools. Therefore, religious beliefs were relegated to the private sphere but seen as a reason that education in the public sphere is not the right fit for everyone. Some homeschoolers still make similar religious arguments, claiming that sending their children to public schools would violate the religious beliefs that they desire to pass on to their children. Robert Kunzman's *Write These Laws on Your Children: Inside the World of Conservative Christian Homeschooling* studies six homeschooling families across the United States to illustrate the diversity even between religious homeschoolers with similar belief systems. For religious homeschooling parents in particular, passing on education to children involves not just schooling but building their children's character. Even though Kunzman is rightly critical of some choices the families he studies make, he identifies important issues that an examination of religious homeschooling brings up: "[h]omeschooling pushes us – as parents, policymakers, and community members – to reconsider what it

means to be educated, how it should happen, and what role the state should play in that process” (11). Kunzman claims some questions, such as “What are the central purposes of education? What kind of person do I want my child to become? How can I make her learning experience the best it can be?” (12), are easy to ignore when education occurs outside the home. He concludes that in order for homeschooling to accomplish educational *and* civic goals, bridging private and public interests, “[f]irst, vital interests of children or society must be at stake. Second, general consensus should exist on standards for meeting those interests. Third, there needs to be an effective way to measure whether those standards are met” (219). At present, some states require homeschoolers to take standardized tests or to provide detailed accounts of their schooling whereas others do not, making it difficult to identify exactly what homeschooled all students learn. Kunzman also recognizes the difficulty for a liberal democratic society to define exactly what “possible good lives” and “the virtues of good citizenship” are without prescribing particular educational experiences that may not work for everyone. His text shows that when anyone teaches, we are constructing definitions of “possible good lives” for our students and fitting our instruction to this imagining.

Religious arguments to support homeschooling are often the most contentious as homeschooling parents argue that they have a right to educate their children, even and perhaps most importantly, spiritually as they want; proponents of public education argue that doing so can lead to brainwashing and children’s lack of exposure to alternative belief systems that results in disrespect for people with different beliefs. Religion often appears in the public sphere – through the physical presence of churches and

congregations, religious protests such as those that are held at abortion clinics, and the inclusion of specific religious beliefs into politics. Outlining these debates and their impact on homeschooling could take an entire project. It is important to understand, however, that few homeschoolers identify religious beliefs as the only or even the most important reason that they educate their children at home. Furthermore, although some homeschooling parents, such as the Bransons in Robert Kunzman's study of conservative Christian homeschoolers, seem intent on passing specific beliefs to their children, even these children express beliefs about issues such as gender roles and abortion that their parents do not hold. The private sphere and the public sphere always overlap, shaping approaches to education in both public schools and in home schools.

Throughout the 1970s, homeschooling continued to grow as publishers such as Bob Jones University Press and A Beka, both conservatively Protestant, began selling curricula to homeschoolers, as schools such as Clonlara began offering administrative oversight to homeschoolers, and as more discourse about problems with public schools circulated.<sup>15</sup> *TIME* magazine also published the first article about homeschooling in a major American weekly in 1978, focusing on Holt and citing multiple reasons for people increasingly deciding to homeschool (religious beliefs, bad schooling situations, and lifestyle mobility). The title of the article, "Teaching Children At Home: Believing They Can Do It Better, Parents Shun Schools," indicates a negative view of homeschoolers that J. Gary Knowles, Stacey E. Marlow, and James A. Muchmore note permeated the

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<sup>15</sup> For example, *The Myth of the Hyperactive Child* by Peter Schrag and Diane Divoky from 1975 suggested that children in schools endured faulty psychological assessment resulting in the over-medication of children as an effort at control over them.

media's perception of homeschoolers from 1970-1979. However, the coming turn in media about the potential benefits and value of homeschooling is indicated at the end of the article: "[b]ut even those who reject Holt's radical solution find it hard to disagree with his view that administrative gobbledygook too often comes between children and their desire to learn" (n.p.). As standardized testing has solidified its place in public education through No Child Left Behind and Common Core State Standards, governing much of the instruction teachers can offer their students, current discussions proliferate about the interference of administrative red tape in children's education. This motivation for homeschooling thrives almost forty years after this article was published.

The 1980s saw great growth in the homeschooling movement as evidenced by a flurry of activity supporting homeschooling. Publications began, some of which continue today, to provide advice and support to homeschooling families and to support communities of homeschoolers that were often divided along religious lines. Gaither identifies two strands of homeschoolers, which he terms "closed communion" (evangelical homeschoolers) who are often linked to the Moores, and "open communion" (liberal homeschoolers) who are often linked to Holt. These divisions flourished in the 1980s and, to some extent, continue today. Several outlets for closed communion homeschoolers began during this time. Gregg Harris began Home Schooling Workshops in 1981 to help create conservative Christian homeschool support groups; Mary Pride published *The Way Home* in 1985 arguing for women to find ways to return to the home and to nurture their children as well as *The Big Book of Home Learning* in 1986 that provided curricular guidance to homeschoolers and continued in various editions until

2004; Sue Welch's *The Teaching Home* magazine ran from 1980-2002; and the Home School Legal Defense Association was established by Michael Farris and Mike Smith, two Christian attorneys, in 1983, although it claims a non-religious mission to provide legal support to all homeschoolers. These closed communion support systems were paralleled by similar, although less prolific, support for open communion homeschoolers. Helen Hegener began *Home Education Magazine* in 1983; *Home Educator's Family Times* began publication in 1986; and Deborah Stevenson created Connecticut-based non-religious legal support for homeschoolers in 1989 that since 2003 has served the nation as the National Home Education Legal Defense (a rival organization to HSLDA, although not as large or as vocal in the media and government). This is just a small number of the forms of support that were available to the parents of the estimated 250,000-350,000 homeschooled children in the U.S. by 1990-1991 (Lines). These homeschoolers did not always identify themselves along religious lines, but the support systems for homeschoolers often were either openly religious or openly non-religious, forcing homeschoolers to align themselves according to religious beliefs. In doing so, closed communion organizations became the most organized and the most vocal, often shaping public opinion about homeschoolers. Religious beliefs allowed these organizations to form bonds with many homeschoolers, uniting around these beliefs in ways that open communion groups often could not because there was no set system of beliefs about religion or even education to bring them together. Because closed communion organizations are usually most visible, homeschooling is often, if somewhat inaccurately, seen as a purely religious enterprise.

Changes occurred throughout the 1990s and 2000s that revealed growth and fracture within the homeschooling community, particularly concerning divisions between open communion and closed communion homeschoolers. In 1994, an aging Raymond Moore published a white paper condemning Michael Farris and other Christian leaders whose tactics threatened to divide homeschoolers along religious lines. Moore begins:

Attorney Michael Farris' homeschooling alarms in states from Coast to Coast, and federally over the last four years, and particularly his national alarm on the HR-6 amendment [an amendment that said full-time teachers in schools had to be certified with unclear ramifications for homeschooling parents], constitute a serious tactical error if homeschooling is to be known for its serious contribution to American education instead of simply another passing educational fancy, and if it is to be truly respected by legislators instead of pressuring them.

The white paper continues to indict divisive tactics, particularly Farris's and Gregg Harris's,<sup>16</sup> and to call for unity in the homeschooling movement and "[f]riendliness and concern for other schools" (n.p.). According to Moore, Farris seemed more concerned with a very particular group, Christian homeschoolers, than with the more public enterprise of the education of all children. His approach plays into criticisms of homeschooling parents as removing their children from the public sphere without regard for other children's education. Because Farris continues to be the vocal leader of HSLDA who often serves as the public face of homeschooling, his version of homeschooling is

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<sup>16</sup> Harris briefly worked for Moore. In his white paper, Moore claims that Harris used this position to provide a platform for himself, telling those who contacted Moore's office about having Moore speak about homeschooling that Moore was unable to and that he would be coming instead. Moore further claims that during a visit Harris made to his wife after Harris left them, Harris admitted to his fraud, saying, "I had to hustle to make a living."

the one most often seen and heard even if it does not represent the views of all homeschoolers about their educational practices.

Other conflicts have occurred between homeschooling supporters, often because as homeschooling has grown, it has become big business. Curriculum costs alone average \$400-599 per child (HSLDA, “Homeschool Progress Report: 2009,” 5) with additional varying costs for group courses in cooperatives, social activities such as sports, and membership in homeschool support groups or organizations. With millions of dollars at stake, competition between publishing groups, online schools (or cyberschools) offering administrative or curricular oversight, and organizations can be fierce. One incident exemplifies this competition. In 2008, Helen Hegener published criticism of the business practices of Mimi Rothschild, cyberschool Learning by Grace owner, in Hegener’s popular publication *Home Education Magazine*. The next year, Rothschild filed a lawsuit for defamation against Hegener and homeschooling mother Heather Itoni who wrote the critique. Hegener counterclaims that Rothschild successfully sabotaged the *HEM* website and disrupted publication of her magazine while Rothschild asserts that Hegener and others enacted “a clear conspiracy to discredit Rothschild and bring severe harm to her” (n.p.). Such incidents illustrate conflicts within the growing business side of homeschooling and leadership problems between those competing for the economic payoff of homeschooling. The competition for homeschoolers’ business has become more intense as the homeschooling movement becomes larger and more diverse, struggling to support people from many different places and with different motivations for homeschooling.

The future of homeschooling, including which parents decide to participate in this venture, is very much open. Gaither concludes, “homeschooling represents the future of education: deregulated, market-driven, privatized, malleable, liquid” (225). This consumer attitude towards education is troubling in its association with similar business undertakings that often result in inequalities between those who can afford to do something (with their time and/or their money) and those who cannot. Such a characterization of homeschooling is correct in some respects because many cannot afford the expenditures of time or money that homeschooling requires, even if they desired to. All parents, however, necessarily give up some time and money to raise their children. The homeschooling movement draws attention to the often-invisible amount of work generally required to raise a child, whether they are schooled at home or in a public or private school. Mitchell L. Stevens in *Kingdom of Children: Culture and Controversy in the Homeschooling Movement* argues:

it seems to have escaped our notice that the distinctive, autonomous, promising individualism that we now take for granted needs to be a child first. It needs to be raised....Perhaps we have failed to recognize how much nurturing little selves require, precisely because so much of that work is accomplished by women. (196)

Homeschooling, Stevens claims, brings to light the costs of raising children and makes “those costs explicit” in a form of “revolutionary action” (197) that does not allow others to overlook these costs. Mothers typically take the lead in homeschooling their children – only 19.4% of homeschooling mothers work and only 15.2% of those mothers work full time (HSLDA, “Homeschool Progress Report,” 5) – but the work that all women perform in the home to raise their children is not as easily ignored when some children are at



home all day. Homeschooling mothers do not necessarily do more than other mothers to raise their children, but their unique position as mothers and teachers draws attention to the work of raising children that is often ignored because it is relegated to a largely feminized private sphere.

The most current figures about homeschooling, including an estimated 1.5 million students in the U.S. in 2007 or 2.9% of K-12 students (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, “Table 41”), encompass a quite diverse population. In 2007, the percentage of non-white homeschooled children was 24% of the homeschooling population, the percentage of one-parent households was 7%, the percentage of households with two working parents was 33%, the percentage of households with an income under \$50,000 was 40%, and homeschoolers were mainly found in suburban (33%) and rural (34%) areas (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, “Table 40”). While the majority of homeschoolers are white, two-parent households with one working parent providing a household income over \$50,000, homeschooling families do not all assume this form. Diversity within the homeschooling community has resulted in not just one cohesive homeschooling movement but different groups of homeschoolers with different kinds of leadership, publications, support groups, and discourses about education.

### **Who Controls School?**

Decisions about children’s education often revolve around control: of what is taught, of when and how children learn, of how children’s learning is tested, and of where they learn. Historically, these tensions can be seen in many of the previously-mentioned

court cases where disputes about education, particularly between parents or private schools and the public education system, were resolved. The collective impact of these was to allow for many forms of education in the United States, including alternatives to public education such as private schools and home schools. Although some children have benefited from these options, Apple and others such as Whitty et al. claim that this diversity allows for educational stratification constructed by socioeconomic status. Whitty et al. argue based on international research of vouchers and choice education plans that these lead to the reproduction of inequalities or, as Apple puts it, “the programs clearly have differentiated benefits in which those who already possess economic and cultural capital reap significantly more benefits than those who do not” (“Cultural Politics,” 267). Apple first claims that homeschooling perpetuates similar inequalities by draining money away from school districts to support homeschools through charter schools that merely serve as covers for homeschools. This point he himself admits is not strong since school administrators seek out these alliances in order to claim federal money for homeschooled students. Second, he posits that public money, through these charters, has been used to purchase curricula that espouse undemocratic beliefs, such as the idea that Islam is not a valid belief system. This point raises the question about what belief systems schools acknowledge. We cannot ignore that some individuals hold particular belief systems that negate the validity of other belief systems, whether held by homeschooling parents or others; many can agree, however, that personal beliefs should not lead to the inequitable treatment of other people and their beliefs. This issue revolves around who controls the education of children and who determines what belief systems

will be represented to them in the course of this education, particularly when education generally is considered to be a public or social mission. The most democratic view would provide the space for all religious beliefs; in order to account for all citizens, Apple claims that the public school system must “listen more carefully” to parents’ complaints and “rebuild our institutions in much more responsive ways” (“Cultural Politics,” 269). At present, the federal government, rather than allowing school districts to respond to the needs of their particular students, maintains so much control over education that such responsiveness is difficult if not impossible.

The move to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in almost all public schools by 2014 has brought up more recent conversations about control in education. In 2010, the CCSS was produced in order to outline specific goals for K-12 students in mathematics and English language arts (reading, writing, speaking, and listening).<sup>17</sup> States who agreed to implement this curriculum became eligible for competitive Race to the Top grants, providing a strong incentive for states to adopt these educational goals. Thus far, only five states – Texas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Virginia, and Alaska – have not adopted the standards. The English language arts standards specifically are intended “to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school” (National Governors Association Center). On its face,

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<sup>17</sup> CCSS is available online at [http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI\\_ELA%20Standards.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf). CCSS claims, “[a] particular standard was included in the document only when the best available evidence indicated that its mastery was essential for college and career readiness in a twenty-first-century, globally competitive society” (3). This evidence was, as O’Neill et al. point out, not gathered with assistance from the Council for Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, or the National Writing Project.

at least, the standards are intended to democratically help each child attain an education that will help them succeed in the imagined future American economy. Critics, however, are not as optimistic about the changes that CCSS will bring to public education, particularly because it was built without the input of many national organizations such as NCTE, is entangled with corporate interests,<sup>18</sup> enforces a standardized curriculum (85% of the curriculum must be based on CCSS) and continues to rely on standardized testing to measure which students have reached these goals.<sup>19</sup> Such tightening of control over what public schools teach and how student learning is assessed has only reinforced many parents, including homeschooling parents', beliefs in the need for choice in education. Despite the possible social ramifications of students moving out of public schools, parents are increasingly seeking out alternatives to federal and state governments' control over what, how, and why their children learn.

Both homeschooling parents and other parents have embraced one of these alternatives, virtual schools or cyber charters. Virtual schools are online public schools that provide children with public school curriculum online through the guidance of public school teachers and an adult in the home, usually a parent. As of September 2013, 64 were listed on the Center for Education Reform website.<sup>20</sup> According to Randall Greenway and Gregg Vanourek, virtual schools can differ based on comprehensiveness,

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<sup>18</sup> Including ACT, Achieve, Pearson, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

<sup>19</sup> See Burns; Gangi and Reilly; O'Neill.

<sup>20</sup> In 2009-2010, the Department of Education reports that 1.8 million elementary and secondary students were enrolled in distance education courses (1.35 million were secondary students). Unfortunately, this number is not broken down into how many students attended virtual schools (*The Condition of Education 2013*, 48). This number is up from just 340,000 students taking distance education courses in 1999-2000, indicating a rapid increase in education moving online, even before college.

reach, type, location, and control (36). Virtual schools, in some ways, solve the problems Apple expresses with homeschooling. Parents who elect to enroll their children in virtual schools adhere to a state-mandated curriculum, avoiding biases in curricula they might choose themselves. Parents also financially support the school district or state the virtual school is administered by, avoiding the possible financial ramifications of not supporting the public school system. For homeschooling parents, this option provides them with a structured curriculum, often one of the most difficult aspects of homeschooling to pull together, but allows their children to remain in the home to complete this work. Homeschoolers, however, are divided about virtual schooling because it takes control over curriculum away from parents and places their students in environments still motivated by a culture of testing. These two important facets of virtual schooling often override parents' desire for an already-structured curriculum and the advantages of their children being schooled "in public schools," such as participation in school activities and sports.<sup>21</sup> The point here is that virtual schools are one upcoming, if yet under-researched,<sup>22</sup> facet of school choice designed to give parents more control over their children's education, particularly in the face of initiatives such as CCSS. This "unbundling" of public education, as Hess et al. term it, will likely continue unless, as Apple argues, public schools can become more responsive to the concerns of parents.

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<sup>21</sup> Homeschooled children can sometimes participate in these activities even if they do not attend a cyber charter, but this is up to the discretion of the school district. See Klein for further discussion of virtual schools and homeschooling.

<sup>22</sup> See Cavanaugh for a review of the limited research on cyber charters and additional areas for research, such as comparisons between similar student populations in public schools and cyber charters.

Control is not just exerted generally by school systems. Teachers also maintain control over some aspects of education, including, at the most basic level, control over students' behaviors, specific learning activities, and even language. Two important texts, Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America* and Lisa Delpit's *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, examine ways that control is exerted in the classroom, particularly over linguistic differences. Smitherman provides one of the earliest and best-known interrogations of school literacies, focusing specifically on Black English (BE) and its use in schools. At the time, many argued that BE was a distortion of the English language that children needed to be taught to avoid. Citing the historical importance of BE and its complex structure, Smitherman argues that teachers need to accept students' dialects, understanding BE and acknowledging that it is a legitimate form of communication (221). She claims that the "doctrine of correctness" surrounding the teaching of language needs to be transformed into the teaching of "linguistic and semantic appropriateness, and . . . the ability to employ rhetorical strategies to create a desired mood or effect in your audience and to move that audience in the direction you desire" (233). Doing so would not insist on correctness but, instead, focus on effectiveness of language use for different audiences while respecting the use of BE in the classroom. In other words, Smitherman identified how teachers sought to control students' language use and argued that teachers should encourage students to cultivate multiple literacies that would allow them to effectively communicate in different contexts.

Lisa Delpit makes a somewhat different argument that reaches the same conclusions as Smitherman. She argues that “if minority people are to effect the change which will allow them to truly progress we must insist on ‘skills’ *within the context of* critical and creative thinking” (19; emphasis original), an integration of skills and process approaches. Although others criticized Delpit for these ideas, she insists that issues of power exist in the classroom and that, in order for all students to succeed, they must be “told explicitly the rules” of the culture in power (24). Unlike Smitherman, Delpit claims that one language – standard English – is the privileged language that all children must learn in order to succeed. Certain people who exert power in society control this language, making it the privileged language. Teachers must broaden students’ language skills by teaching them to use standard English. Nevertheless, Delpit ends up with a conclusion similar to Smitherman’s, not advocating the eradication of students’ home languages such as BE but, instead, suggesting teachers should teach linguistic pluralism that provides students with multiple literacies from which to choose in different situations. Both Smitherman and Delpit are intimately concerned with how teachers control students’ languages and identities in the classroom, seeking space in which teachers exert some control while allowing room for students’ to choose what literacies to use in different situations.

Even debates in composition studies about whether writing programs should use standardized curricula, syllabi, and assignments reflect issues of control. In documents such as *The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* and the *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition*, the field as a whole has straddled a difficult line

between telling programs and teachers what students need to learn and telling them specifically how to implement and measure these outcomes. In specific writing programs, questions of whether to standardize curricular documents set up a dichotomy between asking writing instructors often uninvolved in composition scholarship to do too much (by creating their own materials for little pay) and between completely controlling what they teach.<sup>23</sup> Writing instruction, no matter at what level it is offered, always involves questions of control.

Homeschooling parents do not all approach the control of their children's schooling in the same manner. Yi Cai, Johnmarshall Reeve, and Dawn T. Robinson examine the motivating styles used by both homeschooling parents and public school teachers. Placing instruction on a range from "highly controlling" to "highly autonomy supportive" (373), they found that religiously-motivated homeschoolers exert a more controlling style than public school teachers. They conclude that this is because these homeschooling parents have "a preset agenda" that guides how they think children should behave when being schooled (378). Unfortunately, this study did not examine non-religious homeschoolers, so it is difficult to make any generalizations about how homeschooling parents differently control instruction. Cai, Reeve, and Robinson do show, however, that personal views impact the ways teachers control students and their learning, even in the home. When writing instruction is offered by those untrained in writing pedagogies, as is the case for many homeschooling parents as well as some

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<sup>23</sup> See Gallagher, Duffey et al., and Dively for multiple perspectives about the issue of control over writing program instruction in postsecondary institutions.



teaching writing in postsecondary institutions, the control they exert is often founded on their own values.

Before turning to the ways homeschooling parents often determine their writing pedagogies, it is important to understand the educational backgrounds of these parents and how they generally approach writing. The majority of homeschooling parents have at least some college experiences, although some do have much less education. A 2012 study found that 11% of homeschooling parents had less than a high school diploma; 20% were high school graduates; 30% had some college or a two-year degree; and 39% had a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, *Parent and Family Involvement 2012*, 17). Homeschooling parents are diverse in their previous educational experiences, which can determine how they approach their children's education as preparation for college. Regardless of their own educational level, this study also found that most parents, whether homeschooling or not, anticipate that their children will attend college; parents who had bachelor's degrees or above usually anticipated their children completing a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, *Parent and Family Involvement 2012*, 14). Homeschooling parents often undertake their children's education with the goals of their children attending a postsecondary institution in mind, a factor that influences how they approach writing instruction.

Despite a gap in research about how educational level affects homeschooling parents' approach to education, there have been some studies of the reading and writing practices of students. These do not directly relate to parents' educational experiences, but they do illustrate some of the approaches homeschooling parents generally take in the

literacy education of their children. Elaine Huber's "Unexplored Territory: Writing Instruction in Pennsylvania Homeschool Settings, Grades 9-12" provides an overview of the different types of writing instruction homeschoolers employ<sup>24</sup> and studies the writing instruction of six families. Based on the various types of instruction parents provide their children, she concludes, "*Educators and governmental policymakers need to understand homeschooling as an educational alternative in which writing can be learned/taught in a variety of ways*" ("Part II," 12; emphasis original). Homeschooling parents clearly do not subscribe to just one or even several types of writing instruction; instead, each home inculcates a unique type of writing that rests on both how parents value writing and what they perceive their children will need to know in the future.

Focusing on homeschooled high school graduates and their mothers from Seattle, Washington, Knafle and Wescott's "Home School Graduates and Their Mothers Talk About Literacy Instruction" claims that writing instruction, while varied with this group of ten mothers and twenty-three children, is a frequent activity in their homes. Their focus on students who were either attending college, had taken college courses, or planned to enter college the next fall differentiates this particular group from samples of homeschoolers in other studies. Knafle and Wescott conclude, "the mothers and graduates in this study cited a wide variety of positive writing experiences, with few negative memories" (10). They do point out the necessity of parents assessing their children's writing because "[o]therwise, a home school student who didn't like to write

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<sup>24</sup> These include Classical Education writing instruction, unschooling writing instruction, Living Books writing instruction, unit studies writing instruction, textbooks, family-based writer's groups, support group writing classes, online writing services, umbrella school services, and college writing courses.

could avoid writing and therefore not develop necessary skills” (10). This was not the experience of those in this study, however, as students’ parents were involved in their writing instruction and more than half took writing classes out of the home, mostly at homeschool cooperatives.<sup>25</sup> This may have been a result of the homeschooling parents included in the survey: four out of the ten mothers in this study had previously been school teachers who cited various reasons such as cost of private education or bad school experiences playing into their decision to homeschool.<sup>26</sup> Because these mothers would have been more aware of school standards for literacy learning, their approach to their own children’s education likely would be influenced by their previous experiences. Additionally, their willingness to send their children to writing courses not taught by them may be an effect of their comfort level with schools in general, even if not the schools they previously taught at in particular. Therefore, while most homeschooling parents are untrained in writing pedagogies, some have an educational background that informs their home instruction.

Before specifically speaking to how homeschooling parents determine how to teach writing and what this can tell us about others teaching writing, it is important to stop and consider further what I mean by those who are “untrained in writing pedagogies.” It isn’t easy to determine what “untrained” means, whether in relation to writing instruction or anything else. Here, I consider instructors untrained in writing

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<sup>25</sup> See chapter 3 for a discussion of homeschool cooperatives and the types of writing instruction available in them.

<sup>26</sup> This is, statistically, a very large number of homeschooling parents who were previously teachers in schools. These numbers are not likely to be found in the general homeschooling population, although such information is not available.

pedagogies if they have never received explicit instruction about how to teach writing *and* if they do not consistently ground their practices in current scholarship about writing instruction. Importantly, this category embraces a large number of people who have a range of teaching experiences both generally and in writing specifically: most homeschooling parents, some secondary English teachers,<sup>27</sup> some contingent writing faculty in postsecondary institutions, faculty outside English or writing departments teaching writing to their students, and some tenured or tenure-track English or writing faculty without knowledge of contemporary composition scholarship (among others). These teachers have a varying range of familiarity with teaching writing and writing scholarship, but they are generally not invested in keeping up-to-date with current composition scholarship. I call such teachers throughout this project “non-specialist” writing instructors. In doing so, I do not want to denigrate the work that these instructors do; often, they are teaching writing under less than ideal circumstances with their control over their instruction being questioned at many points. But it is important to understand that these instructors face challenges of teaching a subject that they do not have time or inclination to engage with on a regular basis. Some have received explicit writing instruction in workshops or orientations, but most do not regularly read or engage with others in discussions about current composition scholarship. Paul T. Hill claims, for example, that the network to support homeschooling parents has essentially become “a

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<sup>27</sup> Richard M. Ingersoll’s study of the Schools and Staffing Survey in the early 1990s found that one quarter of secondary English teachers did not major or minor in the subject they were teaching (27). Ingersoll argues that good teaching requires knowing what to teach, knowing how to teach, and knowing which methods to use with particular topics, students, and settings (34), which teachers teaching out-of-field do not have experience with.

very large teacher training program” that results in “many tens of thousands of people . . . learning how to teach, assess results, and continuously improve instruction” (22). However, homeschooling parents do not have to participate in these networks if they do not choose to and their involvement in writing pedagogies is up to them. Remaining outside new theories and pedagogies of writing makes it difficult for these parents and other writing instructors to offer writing instruction that reflects what research tells us about teachers and students negotiating multiple home and school literacies in writing classrooms, an often complicated and vexed process.

### **Teachers’ Private and Public Literacies**

In Habermas’s formation of the public sphere, the private sphere and the public sphere are separated from each other. His discussion of the function of education, for example, claims that education has passed from the private sphere of the home and family to the public sphere of public institutions and authorities. Although composition scholars have often considered the role writing instruction may have in the public sphere, other scholars have considered how the public and the private interlink, most typically in the lives of students. These insights, while useful, have not as clearly discussed what happens for teachers when private and public spaces overlap, influencing what they choose to teach their students.

Shirley Brice Heath’s landmark text *Ways With Words* is one example of the ways that composition scholarship often focuses on students’ rather than teachers’ navigations of home and school literacies. In this study of two working class communities that Heath

calls Roadville and Trackton, she argues that the ways of using language that are privileged in these communities do not align with those found in schools or those used in middle class homes in the same town: “[n]either community’s ways with the written word prepares it for the school’s ways” (235). Even though children in Roadville and Trackton are experienced in the use of words both spoken and written, the language used at home is not similar to that privileged in schools. Heath concludes:

...unless the boundaries between classrooms and communities can be broken, and the flow of cultural patterns between them encouraged, the schools will continue to legitimate and reproduce communities of townspeople who control and limit the potential progress of other communities and who themselves remain untouched by other values and ways of life. (369)

Teachers in this study are Townspeople, enforcing the language uses that are supported by this group in classrooms. Heath articulates the close ties needed between home and school literacies, but the teacher’s role is marked as one of providing space for students’ many literacies; she does not investigate how the teachers may also struggle with tensions between home and school literacies, assuming that these do not exist.

Other scholars such as James Paul Gee similarly focus on how teachers can help students negotiate home and school literacies without turning attention to teachers’ navigations of these. Gee argues that spaces outside of the home in which students learn literacies, which he defines as “[m]astery of a secondary Discourse” (*Social Linguistics* 173), matter. Parents’ inability or unwillingness to support secondary Discourses, or ““public sphere”” (*Social Linguistics* 172) languages, can create a disjunction between privileged and unprivileged literacies. Gee claims:

Any Discourse (primary or secondary) is for more people most of the time only mastered through acquisition, not learning. Thus, literacy (fluent control or mastery of a secondary Discourse) is a product of acquisition, not learning, that is, it requires exposure to models in natural, meaningful, and functional settings, and (overt) teaching is not liable to be very successful. It may even initially get in the way. Time spent on learning and not acquisition is time not well spent if the goal is mastery in performance. (*Social Linguistics* 174)

Gee here seeks to redefine teachers' roles by seeing them as masters who help their students learn literacies through an apprenticeship model, but he does not examine the involvement of teachers' own views about literacies in this process. Brandt's *Literacy and Learning*, based in part on her book *Literacy in American Lives*, links literacy and economics, claiming that the government and schools more tightly regulate writing than reading even as other spaces (such as workplaces) become integral sponsors of writing: "Schools are no longer the major disseminators of literacy. Literacy instruction needs to develop from a sense of a new role for schools, as a place where the ideological complexities (including the inequities) of literacy sponsorship are sorted through and negotiated" (180). Brandt seeks here a redefinition of what teachers should help students do: instead of teaching reading and writing as skills, she claims schools should be places where teachers help students understand literacy sponsorship and the implications of this sponsorship. She seeks a redefinition of schools as places that "exist to offset imbalances that market philosophy helps to create – including, especially, imbalances in the worth of people's literacy" (188). Although Gee and Brandt's redefinitions of schooling may be useful, they still do not investigate how teachers might have to reconceive of the literacies they are familiar with and teach if their roles change in the ways they describe.

Glynda Hull and Katherine Schultz's collection *School's Out! Bridging Out-of-School Literacies with Classroom Practice* promises to examine how home and school overlap, but it still does not consider how teachers' valuing of ways of reading and writing can influence those they teach and vice versa. Hull and Schultz argue that school and home literacies can and do work together: "rather than setting formal and informal education systems and contexts in opposition to each other, we might do well to look for overlap or complementarity or perhaps a respectful division of labor" (3). Such an approach more fully considers fluidity between the public and private spheres than Heath, Gee, or Brandt because it identifies some overlaps in literacies rather than simply redefining the relationship between home and school literacies. This book examines in particular literacies in the community and school and in after-school programs. A variety of perspectives is presented, including the voices of those students studied, and putting these literacies in their contexts provides a better look at the effects of home and school literacies on language users and the ways that home and school literacies and spaces often overlap. However, teachers' perspectives about how they navigate private and public influences on their teaching remain noticeably absent. Composition scholarship needs to both reconceive of the relationship between public and private spheres, particularly in relation to literacy learning, and include teachers in investigations of how home and school literacies impact instruction. Doing so can help us reconceive how the public and private spheres overlap and illuminate the tensions writing instructors experience as they design instruction for their students.



I claim we need to move beyond conceptions of the public and the private that rely on Habermas's separation of these spheres, even if we claim there are connections between them. Instead, the public and private must be seen as *always simultaneously occurring*, no matter where a person is located or what activity they are engaging in. Homeschooling disrupts current theorization of the public and private spheres, calling into question how this relationship is configured (as both critics and proponents of homeschooling allude to). Frank Farmer briefly offers an alternative view to Habermas's in *After the Public Turn*. Focusing on popular separation of the public and the private, he argues, "our all too familiar binary is actually much more of a continuum, albeit a somewhat fractured one" (100). His examples focus on spaces in which there exist different levels of the public and the private, such as Zuccotti Park, the privately-owned public space where the Occupy Wall Street movement began. As we examine homeschooling parents teaching their children to write primarily at home, even this conception of a continuum becomes limited. The act of homeschooling cannot be placed at any point on a continuum that asks us to conceive of the public and private as spaces in which we belong "more to" one or another. Homeschooling parents are engaged in a public mission of education usually taking place in their private homes. Rather than thinking of the private and the public as a continuum, they must be viewed as always overlapping spaces in which people continuously operate as both private individuals and public citizens. The influx of technology into classrooms, often perceived by teachers as "underlife" activity,<sup>28</sup> can be better explained as evidence of the overlap of private and

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<sup>28</sup> I borrow the term "underlife" from Robert Brooke.

public spaces. In these instances, students embrace both their public role as students and their private roles as children, parents, partners, and friends through activities such as texting or online messaging while in classrooms. Such overlaps are also seen in the ways people appropriate news, posting it on their Facebook or Twitter accounts and providing personal commentary about these events, particularly posts that include personal references. For example, someone posting a story about the shooting at the Navy Yard in Washington D.C. and commenting “I will be praying for those involved” takes a public act and a public story and privatizes it by relating it to personal actions and personal beliefs.

As we increasingly blend the public and the private, it is important that we examine how this blurring impacts writing teachers and the writing instruction they offer. As has been seen, scholars such as Heath, Gee, Brandt, and Hull and Schultz have examined how the public and private affect each other when these are seen as separate spaces that primarily influence students. Turning attention to what happens when the private and public are simultaneously invoked can be equally illuminating, particularly as we consider how literacies found in these two spheres concurrently shape writing instructors’ teaching. This project is one example of the scholarship that needs to be completed in order to better understand how these overlapping spaces influence writing teachers, examining how homeschooling parents teach writing in spaces that are both home and school for both private and public motivations. Doing so also offers scholars a new examination of a population under-studied in composition studies, homeschoolers, and offers a new methodology for undertaking studies of literacy learning.

### **Widening the Methodological Lens**

Composition studies has just dipped its toe into the pool of homeschool research, and the little research available in our field has problems with both sample size and limitations to particular groups of homeschoolers. These studies open up homeschooling as an object of study in rhetoric and composition, providing insights into what these studies can offer our field. Because of the diversity of the homeschooling population that I outline earlier, however, methodological issues substantially limit how homeschooling has been represented in this scholarship.

Phillip P. Marzluf has published two studies based on a study of six previously homeschooled students at his university. The small sample size and the limitation to one university replicate the methodological problems I identify. Both are critical of the perspectives homeschoolers bring to first-year composition courses, particularly the Christian fundamentalist perspectives Marzluf claims homeschoolers have.<sup>29</sup> In “Writing Home-Schooled Students into the Academy,” Marzluf claims that homeschooled students enter composition classes with particular ideologies that they may be unwilling to shift, ideologies he identifies as springing from the particular social context their literacy learning occurred in. Although he doesn’t theorize his research with public sphere theory, he is concerned with homeschoolers’ inability to participate in a democratic public sphere. Marzluf makes the case that “we need to be aware that home-schooled students’ reinterpretation of such values as tolerance, inclusiveness, and free methods of inquiry limits their force, granting students freedom to express their opinions only if they are able

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<sup>29</sup> As I have already discussed, the majority of homeschoolers are not primarily interested in homeschooling because of their religious beliefs.

to opt out of experiences that disturb their social and cultural perspectives” (62). Turning attention to the limitations homeschoolers may face in transitioning to public spaces can be useful, but this conclusion does not hold weight for all homeschoolers or pose a problem only for homeschooling students as he suggests. Marzluf’s estimation of homeschooled students’ transition into higher education is that it will be troubled by students’ inability to account for this new social context, a context that may force them to account for alternative perspectives they have been able to ignore in their home contexts. A more interesting point may be that all students, including homeschooled students, struggle to reconcile private and public interests as they transition into postsecondary institutions generally and first-year writing courses specifically.

Marzluf’s second article, “Literacy, Home Schooling, and Articulations of the Public and the Private,” claims that there is “a new type of literacy crisis” that homeschoolers signal. This crisis occurs as large numbers of historically-marginalized groups enter the educational system and bring with them “unclean, vernacular languages confronting the official, public, and elaborated standard codes of the white middle class” (75). Marzluf posits, “Precisely during the period when these vernacular voices are beginning to gain recognition and legitimacy in the educational and public spheres, home schoolers are retreating from public institutions and constructing literacy and social boundaries of their own” (75). Again, Marzluf does not view his research through public sphere theory, but he is concerned with education as a public institution intended to inculcate linguistic diversity and respect for other people. He views the private space of homeschooling as constructing “boundaries” not just between homeschoolers and

“vernacular voices” but between education in private and in public. The construction of these new boundaries Marzluf views as negative because he posits that homeschoolers return to “the literacy values of the American frontier” that leads to their refusal “to recognize themselves in the calls of public literacy” (95). Therefore, he claims homeschoolers shelter themselves in the home from “calls of public literacy.” Instead, as I have discussed, homeschoolers, like everyone else, are always engaged in education as a simultaneous private and public endeavor. We have not often thought about public education as involving private concerns, but these are apparent in the appearance of home literacies into schools. Similarly, homeschooling parents are involved in tensions between both private and public values of writing. Marzluf’s scholarship draws attention to the homeschooling community as a valuable site to study, one that intersects with various issues such as the role of literacy learning in schools and the effects of this learning taking place in private and public spaces. However, his focus on only six students in one university does not allow as broad a view of homeschooling as is needed in order for rhetoric and composition scholars to adequately understand this community.

The methodological limitations of Marzluf’s study, like some other studies of homeschoolers, call for researchers to identify a different way to gain insights into how homeschoolers approach writing instruction. Studies of students’ experiences with writing instruction usually involve similar methodologies: longitudinal case studies and ethnographies or interview-based research. For example, Marilyn S. Sternglass argues:

Longitudinal research provides the time it takes to get to know students and for them to be willing to share their experiences and the factors in their lives that have contributed in the past and continue to contribute in the present to their

ability to respond to the academic demands being made on them as they simultaneously deal with the other claims on their complex lives. (7)

She further claims, “only through following the *same* individuals over time, through *true longitudinal research*, taking into consideration the complex factors in students’ lives, both personal and academic, will it be possible to determine the combination of elements that influence writing development” (10). Her argument for the value of longitudinal research is echoed by other researchers such as Herrington and Curtis; Carroll; Fishman et al.; Sommers and Saltz; Jolliffe and Harl; Besnier; and Lindquist and Halbritter. Such researchers, however, are primarily interested in students’ writing lives rather than teachers’ writing instruction as I am here. There have also been calls in literacy studies to expand out from the local contexts that ethnography and similar methodologies necessarily draw attention to in order to account for literacy outside of these very specific contexts.<sup>30</sup>

While recognizing the great strides in literacy research that have been made by the turn to social context that facilitated the movement toward case studies, ethnographies, and interviews,<sup>31</sup> Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton’s “Limits of the

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<sup>30</sup> The entrenchment of ethnography as the primary methodology in literacy studies is deep. For example, Niko Besnier in *Literacy, Emotion, and Authority* assumes that ethnography is the only way one would enact the study of literacies in their social and ideological contexts, embedding this assumption in his focus on “an ethnographically informed approach to literacy” that is the only methodology discussed in his text and the methodology he employs. Besnier acknowledges the dangers of ethnography as have others (see Clanchy, Cole and Nicolopoulou, and Miyoshi), but he reworks this methodology rather than seeking different methods of research that could be useful.

<sup>31</sup> As Brandt and Clinton note, this methodological trend necessarily combats the dangers of the autonomous model of literacy posited by Jack Goody, Eric Havelock, and Walter Ong beginning in the 1950s and 1960s. This model distinguishes between oral and

Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice” makes the case that the ubiquity of such research “sometimes veers too far in a reactive direction, exaggerating the power of local contexts to set or reveal the forms and meanings that literacy takes” (338). They claim that research focusing just on local uses of literacies runs “up against certain limitations” that ascribe too much agency to individuals and their uses of literacies in their specific contexts (342). Engaging with Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, Brandt and Clinton argue,

we want to grant the technologies of literacy certain kinds of undeniable capacities – particularly, a capacity to travel, a capacity to stay intact, and a capacity to be visible and animate outside the interactions of immediate literacy events. These capacities stem from the legibility and durability of literacy, its material forms, its technological apparatus, its objectivity, that is, its (some)thingness. (344)

In other words, they argue that literacy should be seen as something with its own capabilities that exist *outside* of particular contexts and use by individuals, which is typically studied through ethnographic and similar methodologies. Literacy is not just something people use in particular places; literacy exists in its own right and it affects the environment in which people live. Brandt and Clinton want researchers to study both the local and global effects of literacies in order to understand how the local and the global are connected through literacy practices. They also identify a need to find “ways of addressing how forms of literacy can disrupt, tear up, and destabilize patterns of social life” when previous research has so often focused on how literacy serves as an

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literate cultures and privileges literate societies, leading to these scholars being labeled as “Great Divide” theorists.

empowering agent (354). In other words, Brandt and Clinton claim more attention needs to be paid to the ways in which literacy can work against people and societies, not just how it can be a positive influence.

My project examines ways that homeschooling parents' enactments of literacy instruction in the home disrupt popular and scholastic conceptions of the separation between the private and public spheres. As Brandt and Clinton suggest, ethnographies or similar methodologies would not offer me the insights to this instruction that I sought. Even if I chose to engage in longitudinal research as other scholars have, such research would be problematic for a variety of reasons.<sup>32</sup> When studying homeschooling parents, the studied group is often small because of the relatively low percentage of homeschoolers who are willing to talk to researchers. Homeschooling parents can be suspicious of the motivations of researchers and worry that opening their homes up also opens their teaching practices to scrutiny by government officials. Their chief concern is that they will no longer be allowed to homeschool, even if their teaching practices are in line with public school standards (Lines, "Homeschooling Comes of Age" 78). Therefore, creating connections with homeschooling parents who are willing to open up their teaching practices requires a lot of time to build trust, just as with other ethnographies. While such methods can be useful, as literacy studies have already shown,

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<sup>32</sup> Many studies of homeschoolers note these same methodological problems. For example, see Lawrence M. Rudner's "Scholastic Achievement and Demographic Characteristics of Home School Students in 1998" and Kariane Mari Welner and Kevin G. Welner's "Contextualizing Homeschool Data: A Response to Rudner" for an example of one study with a published critical response. See also Jeff Archer's insightful discussion of the problems researchers face when researching homeschooling in his article "Unexplored Territory."



they should not be the only method by which we study literacy practices. Further, any sample of homeschooling parents opens itself to criticism because of the many variations in the homeschool population. This problem exists with other populations; however, the unique nature of each homeschooling family's schooling means that any study can only produce results valid for those particular families. Making generalizations from these small sample sizes, although possible, necessarily overlooks the very unique situations homeschooling parents create for their children. For example, making generalizations about homeschooling based on unschooling families would create an inaccurate portrait of homeschooling just as making generalizations based on homeschooling families does not account for unschooling methods. My desire to analyze how homeschooling parents' literacy instruction can disrupt the dichotomized relationship between home and school led me to a new methodology that allowed me to trace larger trends in homeschoolers' writing instruction than I would be able to by using other methods.

This project, therefore, moves away from longitudinal methodologies based in case studies, ethnographies, and interviews. Instead, I enact a methodology that widens the scope of the study of literacy practices in the spirit of Brandt and Clinton's call (which does not propose a specific methodology). I identify sites where literacies are transmitted and discussed – curricula, cooperatives, and an online forum – in which I utilize textual and discourse analysis methods as a lens into the literacies homeschooling parents often teach and what these tell us about the increasingly blurred lines between private and public spaces. Many homeschooling parents utilize these three sites to guide their literacy instruction and to talk to others about these pedagogies. Focusing on them

helps me craft a broad portrait of how homeschooling parents are undertaking literacy instruction and how they make decisions about their teaching. Such a project is increasingly important as more students move into home spaces to complete their schooling and as more homeschoolers go to college – 0.7% of the 2012 class of first-year students in four-year postsecondary institutions, or 10,500 students, were homeschooled (Pryor et al. 23).<sup>33</sup> Even for those students attending traditional schools, much writing is completed outside of the classroom in home spaces where parents exert some control over how students complete work, and students themselves never completely separate home and school literacies. An examination of homeschooling parents draws attention to the ways they negotiate tensions between home and school literacies, making decisions about writing instruction based on their own values and perceived college expectations, which are often conflicting.

This project, as with others that could enact this methodology, would be enriched by further studies of the literacies homeschoolers learn and how homeschooling parents and students navigate tensions between home and school literacies. Other projects could employ ethnographies or case studies to illustrate how particular homeschooling parents do or do not fit into the larger conclusions I draw here or they could employ surveys or interviews to broaden the results of this study and to include quantitative data. When approaching a population that has, in our field, been largely overlooked as I do here, I

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<sup>33</sup> Importantly, this figure does not include those who attend two-year postsecondary institutions, so this number is lower than the figure for all homeschooled students who attend any postsecondary institution. In a 2003 study, over 74% of previously-homeschooled students ages 18-24 had taken college-level courses after high school (HSLDA, “Homeschooling Grows Up,” 2).

argue that employing a methodology that allows for concrete, large-scale conclusions is the best starting point from which other projects can build. Placing research about specific individuals and groups with specific literacy practices into context with what we already know generally about these literacy practices, as Brandt and Clinton push researchers to study, provides large and small portraits of literacy learning. Both perspectives are necessary in order to fully understand how literacies shape the overlapping private and public spheres individuals find themselves in today.

### **Overview of Project and Conclusions**

The next three chapters of my project employ this methodology to study how homeschooling parents negotiate tensions between private and public interests as they offer writing instruction to their children. The second chapter, “Homeschool Curricula: Understanding the Literacies Taught,” examines three popular homeschool writing curricula (as determined by reviews in homeschooling magazines and homeschooling forums): *Institute for Excellence in Writing*, *WriteShop*, and *Brave Writer*. Curricula offer homeschooling parents the most control over what their children learn about literacies and how they view the role of writing in their lives. It would seem, then, that homeschooling parents could easily choose writing curricula based solely on their personal values and beliefs. However, two of these three writing curricula, *IEW* and *BW*, point parents and children to writing skills that are intended to help students succeed with college writing. In doing so, they acknowledge worries that homeschooling parents have about making sure that their children receive instruction that can lead to college writing

success. Most homeschooling parents, therefore, do not simply account for their private interests when choosing writing curricula. Instead, they seek out curricula that meet both their students' personal *and* public needs. This chapter illustrates the continuing overlap between home and school, even in cases where homeschooling parents could retain ultimate control over their children's writing instruction. Control over literacies cannot lead to the complete ignorance of public interests because these are always present, even in homes, whether people choose to work with them or against them. Consequently, no writing instructors, including homeschooling parents, ever escape the overlaps between private and public spheres, and these both necessarily influence any writing teacher's pedagogy.

Homeschooling parents often give up some control over their children's writing instruction to others, although not always to trained teachers in schools. The third chapter, "Homeschool Cooperatives: Relinquishing Control of Literacy Learning," broadens the focus on literacy instruction in the second chapter in order to analyze the language arts courses offered in several homeschool cooperatives in North Carolina. North Carolina is used as a state illustrative, not representative, of the variety of homeschool cooperatives available across the United States. Participation in cooperatives is voluntary, but it is a growing trend with homeschooling parents who seek to provide more formal, out of home courses to children. I provide a survey of cooperatives and explain their relationship to homeschool support groups, using data from the North Carolinians for Home Education website to provide a broad overview of the types of support groups and cooperatives available to homeschoolers. Next, I look closely at the

courses offered by four homeschool cooperatives, concluding that these courses represent a variety of ways parents surrender control over literacy instruction to cooperatives and a variety of ways cooperatives navigate private and public interests. Cooperatives often explicitly delineate what kinds of control over instruction they assume and what control parents retain, particularly by emphasizing how much and what kind of work will have to be completed at home. Doing so allows homeschooling parents to anticipate how cooperative instruction will work with or against their own educational philosophies, helping them make decisions about whether they want to give up control in these ways. When homeschooling parents do decide to enroll their children in cooperatives, they do so with an eye towards their own private interests and the publicly-valued skills their students will supposedly gain in these cooperatives. Cooperatives are spaces in which parents give up more control, but they are still spaces in which home and school continuously overlap. These examples show us how even school spaces are always implicated in private and public interests, serving not as one or the other or even as protopublics<sup>34</sup> but as a new space in which private and public are always interacting.

As homeschooling parents make decisions about writing curricula and cooperatives, they often talk to each other about the implications, both private and public, of these decisions. The fourth chapter, “Homeschool Identities: Negotiating the Personal and the Social,” examines online discourse about teaching writing on a popular homeschool forum. Homeschooling parents discuss how directed writing instruction should be, what specific writing curricula to use, and whether they should relinquish

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<sup>34</sup> See Eberly for a discussion of the writing classroom as a protopublic space, an institutionalized space in which students can practice discourse by thinking about publics.

writing instruction to others as they try to negotiate tensions between their own values and the perceived needs of their students who may move into college writing classrooms. By turning attention to what homeschoolers discuss in relation to writing instruction, I analyze the various approaches homeschooling parents bring to writing instruction and the reasons for the approaches they choose. Although not ethnographic, this chapter provides insights into how individual homeschooling parents make decisions about the overlaps between private and public interests as they teach their children to write. I find that most, while heavily invested in their own educational philosophies and personal values, are concerned with what cultural capital the writing skills their children learn at home will have in postsecondary institutions. This chapter pushes us to understand how private interests can never completely ignore public interests and how public interests are always influenced by private interests or, in this case, how home and school are always overlapping. Writing teachers, no matter where their “class” is located, must always ask what private and public values guide their instruction and how they and their students seek to control these factors.

Finally, I consider how this analysis of the literacies that homeschooling parents teach impacts composition studies and literacy studies in the fifth chapter, “Literacy Teachers in Home/School Spaces.” My project offers insights into what happens when home and school literacies overlap, melding the private and public spheres as occurs in many other environments, including public schools and postsecondary institutions. Furthermore, this project highlights some of the assumptions writing instructors, whether non-specialists or specialists, make as they design and implement particular composition

pedagogies. Ultimately, I am concerned with how the separation between the private and public spheres is not longer a viable model for thinking not just about writing instruction but also about our ways of being in twenty-first century U.S. society. Only by reconceiving of these spheres as one sphere, overlapping in different ways at different times but always overlapping, can we understand how teachers and students learn in classrooms and how people relate to other people.

In writing about homeschoolers, I anticipate that some of my readers will be put off by the overall project of homeschooling, one that pulls children out of public schools and seemingly indicts public education. My project is *not* to defend or to accuse, to praise or to blame the homeschooling movement. Instead, I argue that this is a growing population that, regardless of our own personal beliefs about the choice to homeschool, must be paid attention to because it offers us valuable insights into the ways that private and public interests are always overlapping. The ways that homeschooling parents teach writing has implications not just for those of us who teach previously homeschooled students but for every writing teacher who needs to understand how private and public interests shape the writing instruction they offer their students. All writing teachers, whether homeschooling parents or tenured writing faculty, are simultaneously public and private individuals, seeking control over some aspects of our worlds even as we acknowledge that such control is limited by both the public and the private. We need to understand these blurred lines so we can more deliberately provide instruction to our students that accounts for these competing interests in our lives as well as theirs.

## CHAPTER II

### HOMESCHOOL WRITING CURRICULA: UNDERSTANDING THE LITERACIES LEARNED

HELP!! We have 8 children, 14 years old down to twin 1-year-olds. Our oldest 4 are doing Bob Jones Writing and Grammar. I love the program, but at the end of the week I have about 100 pages to grade and then review with them! Obviously, I struggle to keep up. I need an English/Grammar program that is lower maintenance for me and encourages independence for them. I was considering Charlotte Mason, but know very little about it or it's<sup>35</sup> involvement. Any advice or recommendations would be SOOOO helpful and appreciated! (Practical Homeschooling, 9 October 2013)

The previous post was placed on Facebook on behalf of a homeschooling parent looking for suggestions from other homeschooling parents about writing and grammar curricula. This mother's main concern is the workload that she has to take on, particularly because she has eight children that she is homeschooling and caring for. Rather than being interested in switching curricula because of its content, she is primarily concerned with how she can find a writing and grammar curriculum that fits within the time frame she has to provide instruction to her children. Although many English instructors may consider 100 pages of grading normal or even easy, this mother has to juggle writing and grammar instruction with instruction in other subjects as well as childcare. Therefore, she seeks alternatives to taking on this amount of work that "encourages independence"

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<sup>35</sup> Throughout this project, I do not mark grammatical or punctuation errors that occur in informal discourse, particularly online. This leaves the text uninterrupted and recognizes that it is not meant to be polished prose.



in her students' learning as well. Suggestions in the comments are numerous, providing this mother with an array of options from which to choose and various reasons other homeschooling parents use them. One, a self-described English teacher, makes two suggestions, one a particular grammar program and the other the suggestion that students go through a writing and revision process for one essay per literary text they read. She claims, "They will learn far more from that than grading and never looking at it again." She also suggests asking students to teach the book to other family members and to link texts being read for other subjects to writing assignments. Other commenters note different techniques, such as having students grade their own or each other's work or the mother not grading everything her children write.

At issue in these comments is the tension between private concerns, such as time limits, and public concerns, such as how students will learn writing and grammar with less attention from their mother-teacher. Any time homeschooling parents determine how to teach a particular subject, they account for both their and their students' private interests as well as more public concerns, such as what students need to learn as they prepare for their future lives, whatever those may bring. What appears simply to be a personal decision – choosing a writing curriculum – actually involves many concerns that are typically assigned to *either* private or public spaces. Examining what writing curricula tell homeschooling parents about writing instruction shows composition scholars how home and school spaces are always overlapping, the literacies used and concerns voiced in each space influencing each other.

Homeschooling parents are sensitive to the individual growth of their children, accounting for these growth patterns and students' interests as they determine how to teach writing to their students. These concerns can be viewed as private concerns because they involve individual development and students' personal pursuits; although the public can be involved in these, they typically only matter in the public sphere if they influence others. For instance, individual development often only matters, at least in terms of teaching and assessment, in general terms to measure whether students have met benchmarks in place for all students. Similarly, students' desires to learn about knitting would not often be viewed as a public matter but their interests in debate would be. Homeschooling parents, however, care about all of these aspects of their children's development, often incorporating them into their schooling. They do so by speeding up or slowing down instruction as needed, regardless of when work is "supposed" to be completed according to grade standards that traditional schools follow, and/or integrating students' interests with their learning of different subjects. Choosing any curricula, including writing curricula, may be viewed as one of the most personal decisions homeschooling parents can make, seemingly not involving public concerns. However, homeschooling parents do not choose writing curricula based solely on private concerns such as their values or students' interests. The need to prepare their students for future writing experiences compels them to balance their focus on the private with the writing skills their children may need to use in public spaces, such as postsecondary institutions and workplaces as well as their communities. What we see at work in writing curricula, therefore, are varying approaches to the overlaps between private and public spaces,

which homeschooling parents themselves negotiate as they choose which writing curricula to incorporate into their children's schooling.

Writing curricula, and textbooks in particular, have been objects of discussion in composition studies for some time.<sup>36</sup> John C. Brereton notes the role of textbooks in early twentieth century composition courses, their importance reflected in the listing of specific texts in course descriptions, such as the basis of Harvard's English A on Adams Sherman Hill's *Principles of Rhetoric* (11). Although many more writing textbook options are now available, including open source, custom, electronic, and in-house textbooks, composition textbooks continue to exert influence over what is taught in composition courses.

Students, however, are not the only people to learn about writing from textbooks. Their role in instructing writing *teachers* has been noted by Robert J. Connors, who argues in "Textbooks and the Evolution of the Discipline" that in the nineteenth century "textbooks went from servants to masters" (180), assisting teachers who often approached writing courses without extensive training in the teaching of writing. This position is reflected in astounding textbook sales. For example, Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres* went through at least 66 full-length editions in the United States between 1784 and 1874 as well as abridged versions between 1803 and 1911 (Connors 180). Connors

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<sup>36</sup> For example, a 1981 issue of *CCC* includes several articles addressing textbooks, including "Choosing a Reference Book for Writing" by Barbara Currier Bell, "Rating Your Rhetoric Text" by William Dowie, "Sexist Language in Composition Textbooks: Still a Major Issue?" by Mark K. DeShazer, and "Sophisticated, Ineffective Books – Dismantling Process in Composition Texts" by Mike Rose. More recently, W. Ross Winterowd, Debra Hawhee, Elizabeth Miles, Xin Liu Gale and Fredric G. Gale, Kathleen E. Welch, and Xiaoye You have explored diverse aspects of composition textbooks, including the influences of particular textbooks, publishers' control over textbooks, and cultural and ideological assumptions underpinning textbooks.

claims that this book became the first textbook when questions were added to the original text; the addition of questions helped classroom monitors, usually older students, drill other students without needing much knowledge of the material themselves. At this point between 1810 and 1835, many new textbooks became “directive” to fill the need to help teachers or older students teach writing (182). The problem Connors identifies as supporting this new textbook trend – “a shortage of trained, effective college rhetoric teachers” – has continued (183). Although a shift has occurred with the advent of composition journals and rhetoric and composition programs as well as WPA positions, composition teachers are still often non-specialist writing instructors who are not well-versed in composition scholarship. Before students encounter textbooks, instructors often use them to understand how to teach writing. This can occur not only when new writing instructors pore over assigned textbooks to learn how to teach writing and also a program’s philosophy of writing but also when instructors in other disciplines learn about writing through textbooks as they incorporate writing into their courses through writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) or writing-in-the-disciplines (WID) initiatives. Textbooks play an important role in teaching non-specialist instructors about writing pedagogies and form, therefore, an important site through which to study writing instruction.

Most homeschooling parents must mirror the approach to composition textbooks that new, untrained writing teachers often take.<sup>37</sup> Some parents have teacher credentials

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<sup>37</sup> Teachers using curricula to teach them a subject that they will then teach to students is not a phenomenon unique to writing instruction. Ingersoll, for example, found that one third of all secondary math teachers, one quarter of all secondary English teachers, one fifth of all secondary science teachers, and one fifth of all secondary social studies teachers neither majored nor minored in a subject related to that which they are teaching

or college degrees that have provided them with some understanding of composition. However, most are not knowledgeable about contemporary composition scholarship and are largely unaware of issues or trends that many composition scholars are aware of, such as debates about the merits of online writing courses, national documents outlining writing standards such as the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* or the *WPA Outcomes Statement*, and various approaches to composition pedagogy. Additionally, 31% of homeschooling parents have never been in a college-level course (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, *Parent and Family Involvement 2012*, 17) or, if they have, may have done so many years in the past.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, homeschool writing curricula either must provide explicit instruction for parents in the form of teacher

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(27). Although he does not discuss the role curricula play in educating these teachers, it seems apparent that it is not just homeschooling parents or other non-specialist writing instructors who rely on alternative ways to teach themselves what and how to teach students. Homeschooling parents often discuss what curricula to use when teaching other subjects, particularly math. In these instances, however, they seem less concerned with what to teach and more concerned with *how* to teach.

Writing, for homeschooling parents at least, is a difficult subject to teach because their non-specialist status means that they are less familiar with specific kinds of writing that will prepare their children for their futures. This confusion is perhaps exacerbated by the variety of writing students at different traditional schools learn; some states may ask all high school seniors to complete senior projects of a specific length and including research, as North Carolina does, while others may not have a similar requirement. These differences can also be seen when looking at writing across postsecondary institutions; while college algebra or introduction to biology often teach students similar things, first-year writing courses take a multitude of approaches involving varying amounts and types of writing. Discussions about the “content” of first-year writing courses highlight these differences (Wardle and Downs; Bird; Miles et al.). Although homeschooling parents may be just as unfamiliar teaching math or science as they are teaching writing, they often feel more familiar with the content students learn in those courses than in writing courses and, therefore, less clearly understand the public stakes of writing instruction.

<sup>38</sup> As I discuss in chapter one, 31% of homeschooling parents have either only a high school diploma or less than a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, *Parent and Family Involvement 2012*, 17).

handbooks (that often resemble curricula as well) or must speak directly to them rather than to students. In the first case, curriculum explicitly carries not just the weight of teaching students to write but also of teaching parents how to teach their children to write. In the latter case, the curriculum ignores students in favor of recognizing parents as the actual teachers of students, trying to inculcate parents in specific philosophies and practices of teaching writing so that they can then teach these to their children. In both cases, the curriculum must replace any training college composition teachers may receive during orientation or training sessions *and* it must replace any knowledge of composition scholarship and pedagogy composition specialists have. This process of learning about writing from writing curricula is not uncommon with other non-specialist writing instructors as already mentioned. Studying how writing curricula approach homeschooling parents as inexperienced writing teachers shows us how teachers learn about writing from curricula, even though they often do so in less explicit ways with curricula written ostensibly to students.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The phenomenon of providing instructor's manuals with textbooks is a trend that does not seem to be disappearing and that provides direct instruction to writing instructors about how to use a writing textbook in a course. Whether writing instructors use these and to what degree has not been researched, but, similar to homeschooling writing curricula, they educate teachers about not just how to teach writing with a particular textbook but also how to teach writing in general. For example, the instructor's manual to the textbook *Good Reasons with Contemporary Arguments and Handbook* states as one of the features of the text "Its fundamental conviction that courses in rhetoric and composition teach skills to students that they will need not only in school but also in workplace and as citizens of a participatory democracy" (x). This manual, therefore, is not just about helping writing instructors develop courses or think about readings, as it also does, but it further aims to illuminate the particular philosophy about writing that the textbook espouses.

Similar to other writing instructors, whether specialists or non-specialists, homeschooling parents have an overwhelming variety of curricula available to choose from that espouse different writing philosophies and practices. Daniel Princiotta and Stacey Bielik's study "Homeschooling in the United States: 2003" is one of a few to specifically survey a large sample of homeschoolers' curricular choices. Their survey of the parents of 239 homeschooled students found that they use "one or more of the following sources of curricula or books for their children's home education" (iv): a public library (78 percent); a homeschooling catalog, publisher, or individual specialist (77 percent); a retail bookstore or other store (69 percent); an education publisher unaffiliated with homeschooling (60 percent); homeschooling organizations' texts (50 percent); a church, synagogue, or other religious institution's texts (37 percent); their local public school or district (23 percent); and a private school (17 percent) (16). These various sources for curricula serve as a litmus test for the wide variety of options available to homeschoolers; each of these sources has its own benefits and drawbacks, including approaches to the relationship between textbooks, teachers, and students. Because Princiotta and Bielik's study is not limited to writing curricula, it is impossible to know how many homeschooling parents turn to textbooks specifically focused on writing instruction and where these come from. However, it is clear that many homeschoolers rely on published textbooks – whether from a homeschooling publisher, an educational publisher, or another publisher – to structure their schooling.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Readers should keep in mind that, as I discussed in the first chapter, unschooling is a popular facet of homeschooling. Unschoolers do not typically use any textbooks unless their children desire specific instruction in a subject. They are more likely to draw on less

Largely due to the many options available and their focus on providing individualized instruction to their children, homeschooling parents often choose multiple sources for different subjects or even the same subject, taking a piecemeal rather than a holistic approach to education. Anthony distinguishes between these, calling the first “independent” and the latter “packaged” (27). With the former, homeschoolers either use various pre-designed curricula for individual subjects or create their own curricula from various sources. Anderson claims, “When done right, they [created curricula] can be imaginative and substantial” (n.p.). For instance, one father in a family he interviewed was a lawyer who designed a stringent logic curriculum for his children. Homeschooling parents are thus able to customize instruction according to private concerns, such as the value placed on certain subjects such as logic and children’s affinities for certain subjects, while also considering what will prepare their students for participation in society. Lisa Kander, a homeschooling mother whom Anderson interviews, attributed flexibility to her success with homeschooling: ““Homeschooling allowed our four children to reach a readiness moment for reading skills on *their* timetables, not on an arbitrary curriculum chart”” (n.p.). Homeschooling parents often discuss flexibility as a major advantage to homeschooling; this is a concern with the individual development of children that allows for greater flexibility than in schools where children are expected to reach certain benchmarks in certain grades. It is not that Kander ignores the public interest in her children’s literacy skills. Instead, she allows her children to privately learn to read on

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conventional resources, such as the Internet and the library, to provide their children with the education that their children define for themselves. This is typically because textbooks structure learning in ways that don’t allow children to determine what they want to learn and when they want to learn it.



their own timetables even as she still expects that they will eventually obtain this publicly-valued skill.

The Internet has become an increasingly used resource by homeschooling parents as they seek out flexibility in curricula for private purposes. Another study of 250 homeschooling families by Linda G. Hanna found that parents often put together their own curriculum from a variety of sources, including the Internet: “most families chose an eclectic [or in Anthony’s term, independent] approach and used a variety of options” to construct an entire curriculum for their children (620). The eclectic approach is characterized by homeschooling parents’ use of various curricula according to student needs and their own perception of use value in students’ future lives. Carolyn C. McKeon’s study of 707 homeschoolers in 47 states and D.C., for example, found that 69.5% of her surveyed 707 families characterized their curricular approach as “eclectic” (81). A growing trend that Hanna points to is the rising use of the Internet by homeschooling families. In different categories of her subjects from rural to urban, computer use rose from 27.5-90% in 1998 to 72-94% in 2008. Despite variations across different demographic groups, the majority of homeschoolers in this group integrated computers into their schooling. HSLDA’s slightly more recent 2009 study of 11,739 homeschoolers found that 98.3% used a computer at home (“Homeschool Progress Report 2009,” 5).<sup>41</sup> Approaching curricula through a piecemeal rather than a packaged

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<sup>41</sup> By comparison, in 2009, 99% of public school teachers reported having computers available to them every day, whether in the classrooms or available to be brought into the classroom, with a ratio of students to computers 1.7:1 and 95% of these computers having Internet access (*Teachers’ Use of Educational Technology*, 5). Similar data about homeschoolers’ students to computers ratio and Internet access are unavailable, but it

approach allows homeschoolers to capitalize on the flexibility of homeschooling by fitting curricula to their students' needs and interests, private concerns, while also still achieving educational goals, public concerns.

Even as homeschoolers exercise flexibility over their children's curriculum through independent curricula, eclectic approaches to choosing curricula, and the Internet, they still balance private and public interests. Homeschoolers' motivations for homeschooling, involving both private and public interests, often determine to some extent the curricula that they end up using. The most pronounced reason homeschooling families in McKeon's study cited for deciding to homeschool were academics (562 out of 707 homeschoolers or approximately 79%), which is generally a public concern. These homeschooling parents determined that traditional schools were not fulfilling the public mission of educating their children and decided to take on this task themselves, including responses such as "To be academically challenged," "We think we can do a better job," and "My husband and I decided to educate our children at home because of the squalid state of our public schools. We tried private school for a short time but the expense led us to keep them at home" (99).<sup>42</sup> A more private interest, flexibility of instruction, guided 47.6% of twenty-one families whom McKeon interviewed in their decision to homeschool (100). Homeschooling parents' responses to this reason include "To be allowed to learn at their own pace, and to have free time to develop their creativity" and

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appears that publicly schooled students and homeschooled students have approximately the same access to computers, although the frequency of use may differ dramatically in different schools and homeschools.

<sup>42</sup> As can be seen in this response, economics is one factor that can push some parents to homeschool, particularly if they cannot afford private school tuition but do not wish to send their children to public schools.

“The teachers no [sic] allowing her to work ahead and making her stay at the pace as the rest of the class” (McKeon 100). Speaking to the latter, McKeon claims, “The homeschooling movement has established a strong preference for individualized learning, which many parents credit for the success of its students” (8). This focus on private needs of children’s schooling can be seen in Anderson’s study as well as statistics about reasons why homeschooling parents decide to homeschool.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps the most personal or private reasons some homeschoolers decide to provide schooling to their children at home is religious beliefs. As noted in the first chapter, religious or moral beliefs are second to quality of education in homeschooling parents’ reasons for homeschooling their children. Therefore, even for homeschooling parents who have specific religious beliefs, these do not always guide their curricular decisions. Only six out of twenty-one families (or approximately 29%) whom McKeon interviewed cited religious orientation as one way they chose curricula (104), although in her survey 40.7% (326 families) cited religion as one of the reasons they chose to homeschool (86-87).<sup>44</sup> One parent responded, “We decided to homeschool in order to foster a hunger for a living relationship with Christ and the tools of perseverance, obedience, and discipline to realize that relationship” (100). McKeon’s findings suggest that religion plays a role in many homeschoolers’ overall decision to homeschool, but the integration of religious beliefs into curricula is not as much of a concern for most, even

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<sup>43</sup> See discussion of these reasons in chapter one.

<sup>44</sup> Notably, McKeon found that 42.7% of the homeschoolers she surveyed practiced “alternative religions” or claimed no religion (129). This is a higher figure in other studies, perhaps indicating a skewed sample, but it does indicate a growing diversity of religious beliefs within the homeschooling population.

those homeschoolers who are religious. Although her study does not suggest reasons for this difference, it may be that quality of education, a public interest, overrides religious beliefs, a private interest, when homeschooling parents choose curricula. In fact, McKeon suggests, “there is no longer a clear divide between why parents choose to homeschool. It may be more of a holistic approach to education with ideological and pedagogical reasons converging to develop the entire child” (131). Although she does not use the language of private and public spheres, it is clear that she is talking about how homeschooling parents incorporate both private (ideological) and public (pedagogical) interests into their approaches to homeschooling. Both of these are taken into account by homeschooling parents as they choose curricula for their children.

When scholars turn specific attention to links between religious beliefs and curricular decisions, they find that religiously motivated homeschoolers often choose more structured curricula in general than other homeschoolers. Jane A. Van Galen argues in a 1988 study of sixteen homeschooling families, in the beginning of the movement when more parents chose to homeschool for religious reasons, that those homeschoolers who are religiously motivated to homeschool rely much more on traditional or packaged curricula than others, results that are corroborated by Anna T. Kozlowski’s interviews with twelve Alabama homeschooling families in 1999. Similarly, Ed Collom’s 2005 study of 235 homeschooling families finds that homeschooled students with conservative parents perform better on standardized tests, which he postulates is because of conservative parents’ inclination “to teach their children specific knowledge and values and to replicate the classroom environment at home” (330). He also claims,

“Conservatives are also more likely than liberals to accept standardized testing and take the results seriously” (330).<sup>45</sup> These parents could still take an eclectic approach to homeschooling, but Collom found that they paid more attention to the replication of school subjects than liberal homeschooling parents, who embraced a much looser definition of schooling based more on student learning broadly defined than on students learning particular subjects.<sup>46</sup> These findings suggest that religious and conservative homeschoolers offer more structured instruction to their children, seeking to replicate school at home. Even as they do so, the curricula they choose may be from different publishers or sources. The homeschooling population as well as available curricula and the Internet has diversified much more in the past fourteen years,<sup>47</sup> leading more homeschoolers, regardless of religious values, to a more “eclectic” approach to curricula.

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<sup>45</sup> No data is available concerning how many homeschooling parents are conservatives or liberals.

<sup>46</sup> The deliberate attention to students’ learning rather than students learning subjects can be particularly seen in the “unschooling” movement. Carolyn Kleiner focuses on unschoolers, pointing out that in a group of teenage unschoolers “There’s not a teacher or textbook in sight” (n.p.). With this method, “There is no set structure or curriculum; parents simply allow their children to determine what they want to study and when, offering guidance only when necessary” (n.p.). The central difference between unschooling parents and homeschooling parents is the use of curricula and curricular structure provided by parents; in homeschooling, both of these are central even if they are eclectic. In unschooling, they don’t matter unless students want them to.

<sup>47</sup> Collom argues, “Parents’ motivations for homeschooling are not uniformly affected by their education, gender, income, marital status, previous involvement with homeschooling, or political identification” (326). He consequently concludes that homeschoolers cannot easily be pigeonholed into “types” (326). This is important to keep in mind as generalizations are made about homeschooling parents; perhaps more than other populations because of the many reasons parents decide to homeschool their children, homeschooling parents often have a variety of reasons, both private and public, that they homeschool which are not completely like other homeschooling parents’. These unique reasons influence the curricula they choose.

These many concerns – why homeschooling parents choose particular curricula, how writing curricula approach parents as non-specialist teachers, the varied approaches to curricula – shape how writing curricula for homeschoolers is written, marketed, and used. As can be seen in this discussion, homeschooling parents negotiate many tensions as they choose curricula. Sometimes one is prioritized over the another, but none are completely ignored. What can be seen as an extremely personal choice, choosing writing curricula, also involves determining why students should learn a particular writing approach and what this approach will help them accomplish in their futures. These represent the public concerns that homeschooling parents take into account as they examine writing curricula, learn from them how to teach writing, and offer writing instruction to their children.

### **Locating Curricula**

Much curricular choice for homeschoolers has moved online, and even reviews are often found online now instead of in homeschooling magazines or books as was typical before 2000. Hanna’s study notes that homeschooling families between 1998 and 2008 increasingly used the Internet for “seeking curricular advice” (623). For example, Cathy Duffy’s extremely popular book *101 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum* published in 2012 is the latest in a series of books she began in 1984 to help homeschoolers decide what curriculum would work for their families. Many of her reviews, however, are available online at her website *Cathy Duffy Reviews*. The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) also offers a list of popular homeschooling

curricula, including writing curricula, as “a concise start to your [homeschooling parents’] search for the right curriculum.” I determined that mining these sources and others for curricula frequently mentioned and positively referred would help me to pinpoint writing curricula frequently used by homeschoolers.<sup>48</sup> From previous research about homeschooling and curricula, I knew that these were two sources that homeschoolers have valued and trusted for several decades. However, I also knew that these sources have a particularly religious stance towards homeschooling that, as I have discussed, does not accurately reflect the concerns of most homeschooling parents when they choose curricula; therefore, I sought out other sources of reviews as well.<sup>49</sup>

A search for homeschool forums about writing curricula led me to several places I eventually used to help me pinpoint which writing curricula to study. The first,

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<sup>48</sup> Determining exactly how many homeschoolers use the writing curricula I eventually examined is not an exact science for many reasons. The first is that no data exists about how many homeschoolers use specific types of curricula; even if sales are confirmed with publishers, homeschoolers frequently purchase used curricula from each other, online, or in stores. Additionally, homeschoolers with multiple children often pass down curricula from one child to the next. Therefore, I knew that I could not expect to simply pinpoint the “most used” writing curricula. Instead, I sought information about what curricula was most frequently mentioned and recommended in reviews and discussions, relying on this information to tell me what homeschoolers said they often used and to pinpoint the curricula I would examine. I cannot, subsequently, make any assertions about the number of homeschoolers who use the curricula I chose beyond noting the frequency with which I saw reviews and recommendations and the incomplete sales data I have.

<sup>49</sup> Even though there are many reasons parents decide to homeschool that do not just hinge on religion, Christian homeschoolers are the most organized and public voices of homeschooling (see Kunzman; Gaither). This is, in part, because organizations such as the HSLDA and Cathy Duffy, as discussed in the first chapter, formed early in the homeschooling movement to provide support and protection to Christian homeschoolers. Organizations to support homeschoolers with other beliefs or secular homeschoolers concerned primarily with academics have more slowly appeared (see my discussion of Christian and secular groups and their perceptions of private and public concerns in the next chapter).

HomeSchool Reviews, is a website started in 1999 that allows homeschooling parents to provide reviews about curricula they have used. This website has more than 6,000 reviews about almost 700 titles. While this certainly doesn't cover all the curricula available, it is one of the biggest databases of its kind and is often recommended in homeschooling forums as a place homeschoolers can go to find out information about curricula. In addition to offering homeschoolers free reviews by other homeschoolers, this website is identified as neither religious nor non-religious, allowing for maximum flexibility in the curricula that is reviewed. Another website, SecularHomeschool.com, was helpful in tempering the religious bias of Cathy Duffy and HSLDA. This website serves as an online gathering place for over 6,000 "Eclectic Homeschoolers\*Freethinking Homeschoolers\*Non-religious Homeschoolers." In addition to blogs and groups, it provides curricula reviews and forums on which homeschoolers can discuss curricula among many other issues. Mining these was another valuable way for me to understand the curricula various families choose to use, although ultimately the forums rather than reviews were more useful because of the limited number of reviews available. These websites represented larger communities of homeschoolers talking about curricula in non-religious contexts, a needed balance to other, popular Christian sites.

Several other smaller websites supplemented my use of these to pinpoint frequently used writing curricula. These often appeared as valuable sources for homeschoolers. One, Home School Curriculum Advisor, is a website run by a homeschooling mother who offers reviews of curricula as well as an e-Course for homeschoolers about how to choose curricula. Because she writes reviews herself, she



identifies popular curricula choices and reviews these (unlike HomeSchool Reviews that offers many more reviews of less popular curricula), offering comparisons about the level of teacher involvement needed and the level of structure the curriculum provides. Another discussion space, Homeschool Spot, is an online forum for homeschoolers to discuss various topics, including curricula. Therefore, it does not offer reviews, *per se*, but it does show what curricula homeschoolers are considering using and why and it displays what other homeschoolers have to say about these curricula, a type of informal review. Finally, School House Review Crew is a group of approximately 200 homeschooling families who blog about different homeschooling products, mostly curricula. They are linked to *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine* and also offer reviews of curricula online and on Facebook. Together, these sources offer insights into the writing texts homeschooling families frequently consider and eventually choose.

### **Public and Private Negotiations in Homeschool Writing Curricula**

The three curricula discussed in this chapter represent three different pedagogical models, often with different approaches to helping homeschooling parents navigate overlapping private and public concerns. Despite these differences, they all emphasize the importance of parents moving at students' individual paces, seeking to teach different aspects of writing as students' development indicates is helpful and necessary. This is a primarily personal concern that public schools have difficulty considering because of the emphasis on standardized test performance and grades as well as teachers' struggles to handle competing pressures from various stakeholders (administrators, parents, students,

and, certainly not least, national mandates). At the same time, these writing curricula do not ignore public concerns. In fact, two of them – Institute for Excellence in Writing (IEW) and Brave Writer (BW) – directly address students’ preparation for college writing. Such attention clearly illustrates how concerns about college preparation weigh heavily on some homeschooling parents’ minds, so much so that writing curricula often directly point out how their approach to writing can help students transition to college. The third, WriteShop (WS), fails to account for this particular public concern but it still acknowledges the general importance of writing as a skill that students should acquire. It also has a more specifically religious focus, pulling personal values into the curriculum more than is found in either of the other two discussed here. We can generalize, therefore, that while all three display how parents are invested in both private and public interests, WriteShop is less interested in the public narrative of students only succeeding if they go on to college and more interested in the personal values of homeschooling parents and how these overlap with the public valuing of writing instruction generally. All three curricula illustrate how homeschooling parents’ decisions about writing curricula, which could be viewed as their most personal decisions, are still entangled in both personal and social investments in writing instruction.

Before discussing particular aspects of these three curricula and the ways they help homeschooling parents negotiate private and public concerns, I provide information about what these curricula offer parents and their children. IEW, also often shortened to Excellence in Writing, was founded by Andrew Pudewa, a former English and history teacher and a violin teacher. Pudewa exemplifies what a non-specialist instructor is – he

has no English or education degree. Although he has more background in teaching than many homeschooling parents, he does not have training in composition or writing instruction. While teaching in a small private school in Montana, Pudewa attended a course in Canada called the Blended Sound-Sight Program of Learning taught by a professor of African history, James Webster, who had developed the program based on his aunt Anna Ingham's method of teaching reading and writing to elementary school children. Webster decided that he needed to teach his students to write because they could not construct sound essays for his classes. Of note, again, is Webster's status as a non-specialist writing instructor. Although IEW places great emphasis on Webster's status as a college professor, endowing him with professional ethos, Webster, like Pudewa, was untrained in composition or writing pedagogy. Webster clearly understood better than Pudewa and many homeschooling parents general standards for college-level writing, but the status he is given in IEW is not completely warranted since his expertise is not in writing but in history. Further, Webster's method of teaching writing through models and checklists reduces writing to following a set formula, as is echoed in IEW. As composition scholars can attest, writing involves much more than looking at models to mimic and checking items off of a list.<sup>50</sup>

IEW is perhaps the most frequently cited writing curricula, recommended and discussed almost every time someone asks a question about writing curricula online. Its popularity can be seen in the number of places it appeared in my survey to locate

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<sup>50</sup> It's possible that Pudewa mischaracterizes Webster's instruction. However, Pudewa's insistence that he develops IEW based on Webster's method of instruction and the content of IEW suggest that Webster's instruction focused on formulaic conceptions of writing at the college level.

curricula; HSLDA, Cathy Duffy, Home School Curriculum Advisor, HomeSchool Reviews, Homeschool Spot, and School House Review Crew all recommended that homeschoolers consider it for writing instruction. Sales figures from Julie Walker, the marketing director for IEW, provide detailed information about how popular the curricula is. Level C, which is IEW's most advanced level for high school students and is the level I focus on in this chapter, comprises roughly 10% of IEW's total sales, which in 2012 exceeded \$4,000,000. More important than sales, however, is number of units sold. From 2004-2012, IEW Level C (high school level) sales totaled 16,751 units. Because homeschoolers often reuse or purchase used curricula, these curricula have likely been used by more than this number of students.<sup>51</sup> Other indicators of IEW's popularity are their Facebook page which has over 9,000 "like"s, their Yahoo group for parents which has over 10,000 members and averages 200-700 messages per month after fourteen years of existence, and their Yahoo group for co-op and small group teachers which has over 1100 members and averages 100 messages per month after six years of existence. Therefore, it appears that Pudewa's ethos as a non-specialist writing teacher who draws on Webster's credibility as a college professor has a great amount of currency with homeschooling parents. Webster's ethos as a professor, in particular, is emphasized in IEW and speaks to homeschooling parents' desire to prepare their students for college writing, a public interest that they both respect and fear.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> For example, the set of curricula I examined were purchased at a used bookstore and had been circulating since 2004 according to the IEW newsletter with it.

<sup>52</sup> See chapter four for further discussion of how homeschooling parents perceive their preparation of children for college writing.

One potential roadblock for parents interested in using IEW is confusion about which of IEW's curricula to choose. In addition to Student Intensive Level C, the central curriculum for students in high school, they also offer for high school students The Elegant Essay, Student Writing Intensive Continuation Course Level C, Advanced Communication, and courses that integrate writing with other subjects such as the Bible, literature, history, and economics.<sup>53</sup> As with BW, WS, and other homeschooling writing curricula, IEW does not delineate its curriculum according to grade levels. Instead, they offer three levels of curricula that they intend parents to use multiple times with the same child and to tailor to their children's specific needs. Thus, these curricula reject the public model of student development built around grades to focus on a personal model of student development built around their preparation and readiness to learn something. Discussions of IEW often revolve not just around whether or not to use it but what level homeschooling parents should purchase for their children. IEW claims that it offers parents multiple options so that writing can continue to "be used over a range of grade levels" even after one curriculum level is completed ("The Pathway to Excellence" 20). In addition, IEW offers a separate curriculum for parents, *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* (TWSS), that acknowledges their non-specialist status as writing instructors and directly addresses how they can help their children learn to write with the use of their student curriculum. Their recommendation is to begin with the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* (TWSS) and the *Student Writing Intensive* (SWI) level that is appropriate for students ("Recommendations on Where to Start" 14). The difficulty that

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<sup>53</sup> These are less frequently purchased than the core curriculum.

appears with choosing this specific level and with the level of other writing curricula is that without grades to determine what students should learn, parents must be intimately familiar with the developmental level of their children and what they are able and ready to learn. This often leads to parents describing what their children can and cannot do and other parents telling them what they used for similarly-paced children. Rather than remaining a personal decision, then, even choosing levels of a curriculum often become a public project, with more experienced homeschooling parents offering guidance to other parents.

Parents who use IEW don't have to use the teaching writing curriculum and often choose not to because it is an additional cost, which makes discussions of IEW even more complex. Typically, if homeschooling parents use IEW at home, they purchase a specific level for their children that includes DVDs of Pudewa teaching material as well as a workbook of checklists and examples for parents and students to use together. IEW is the only curriculum that I discuss here to incorporate DVDs; when parents use these, they seemingly invite an "expert" into their home to teach their children writing. As has already been discussed, however, Pudewa is not a writing specialist who studies composition scholarship. Therefore, the ethos that homeschooling parents perceive he has is tenuous, although I have not seen discussions of this particular problem by parents. They seek to bring a writing expert into their home in order to supplement the writing instruction that they provide to their children; instead, Pudewa's only qualification is that he has been teaching writing longer than they have and that he has more experience with writing students than they do. Some parents do notice that he is quite stilted on the DVDs

and suggest that parents teach the material themselves rather than having their children watch the DVDs at all. However, others rave about the DVDs and how useful they are. When homeschooling parents choose IEW, they have many choices to make about who their students will perceive as their writing instructor (Pudewa or themselves) and how they will assume this role for writing instruction that occurs without Pudewa's video "presence." The overall popularity of IEW, despite these issues, makes it the powerhouse of writing curricula with homeschoolers, although it still doesn't dominate the market.<sup>54</sup>

Both WriteShop and Brave Writer have fewer levels and permutations of curricula to choose from, but they are still invested in particular views of the relationship between public and private concerns that impact writing instruction. WriteShop offers just three texts: *WriteShop Teacher's Manual (TM)* for both student levels, *WriteShop I (WSI)*, and *WriteShop II (WSII)*. WriteShop also offers vocabulary and grammar programs, but these three books comprise its core writing curricula that most homeschooling parents discuss when talking about this curriculum. WS frequently appears in discussions of writing curricula, is recommended by multiple sources,<sup>55</sup> and its Facebook page has over 3200 "like"s. Therefore, it isn't as popular as IEW but it has established itself as one of the leaders in homeschool writing curricula over the past sixteen years.

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<sup>54</sup> It would be difficult for *any* curriculum, regardless of subject, to control the homeschooling curriculum market given the diversity of homeschoolers and the overwhelming number of options available.

<sup>55</sup> Cathy Duffy, Home School Curriculum Advisor, HomeSchool Reviews, and School House Review Crew.

The creation of WS began in 1997 when Kim Kautzer and Debbie Oldar, two homeschooling mothers, taught a writing course to a group of homeschooled students in a co-op. Like Pudewa, they are non-specialist writing instructors who have no background in composition pedagogy or scholarship. Their ethos is not rooted in methods drawn from a college professor or a writing instructor; instead, they present themselves as two homeschooling parents seeking to show other homeschooling parents how to “teach, direct, and evaluate in a simple way” (“Our History”). As Kautzer and Oldar developed their co-op class, they realized they were unhappy with the options available for them to use with their students. This led to their development of WS, which is now available not only to homeschooling parents but is also used in some private schools. Unlike IEW’s focus on writing instruction that links to college writing expectations, WS focuses much more on how to help parents become writing instructors who encourage good writing habits, such as revision, in their children. This may be partially due to Kautzer and Oldar’s ethos as experienced homeschooling parents who have taught groups of homeschooled children before and who have developed this curriculum to serve their particular needs, needs that other homeschooling parents presumably have. They seek to help fellow homeschooling parents provide similar writing instruction for their children.

WriteShop does not offer as much flexibility to homeschooling parents as IEW in choosing certain parts of its curriculum. Homeschooling parents are supposed to use *WriteShop I* with students in grades 6-10 and *WriteShop II* with high school students after they complete WSI. WS recognizes that many parents do keep track of their children’s grades or grade equivalents, providing recommended grades with which parents should



use these levels with their students. However, they still provide, like IEW, a range of grades rather than offering parents a completely different writing curriculum for each grade a student completes. Emphasis remains on the curriculum being used as students are ready to learn rather than trying to force students through the curriculum just to finish it in a given time period. Unlike IEW, which de-emphasizes the necessity of the teacher's curriculum, WS tells parents that the *TM* is a necessary component of its curriculum because it contains answer keys to some student exercises and lesson plans for parents and students to follow. While this does not mean that all homeschooling parents purchase the *TM* to use with the student curriculum, it does make them a more central part of their children's writing instruction than IEW. The *TM* also teaches homeschooling parents how to evaluate their students' writing, an area largely overlooked by IEW.

Both IEW and WS highlight personal decisions about student development, allow parents to save money on new curriculum for each grade, and suggest that writing instruction simply entails more practice and gradual additions of techniques over time that do not require completely different curricula. The latter view is not always echoed in other subjects that homeschooling parents teach; Saxon Math, for example, a popular math curriculum, offers thirteen levels from kindergarten to calculus. While Saxon carefully scaffolds in new material and still provides homeschooling parents with options about how quickly or slowly their students complete the books, it provides a new curriculum for each grade that shows a progression from simple to advanced math. Writing as seen in these curricula (including BraveWriter, which I discuss next) is much

more about practice and learning general skills than about actual content knowledge of writing.<sup>56</sup>

BraveWriter is a writing curriculum growing in popularity. It doesn't appear as often as IEW or WS on homeschooling forums about writing curricula, but it is frequently recommended.<sup>57</sup> BW is less complicated, providing two curricula to homeschooling parents and students: *The Writer's Jungle (TWJ)* and *Help for High School (HHS)*. For parents who want to use this curriculum but want more support for writing instruction, BW also offers online courses that last from four to six weeks. These are asynchronous courses that give students the opportunity to write for people besides their parents and to receive feedback from other teachers about their writing. Because they are not long courses, they are not intended to replace instruction at home; instead, they are meant to supplement the writing instruction that homeschooling parents provide. By providing this supplemental instruction, BW recognizes the value of students having a more public audience to write to. Julie Bogart, the creator and a homeschooling mother, has a unique non-specialist status. Although not a composition scholar, her ex-husband taught writing courses as an adjunct in a postsecondary institution and she teaches college-level philosophy courses, providing her with connections to the college writing environment if not to writing studies. Bogart has also read some composition scholarship,

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<sup>56</sup> As I have already mentioned, the debate about the "content" of writing courses is ongoing in composition studies, yet more composition scholars today insist on the specialized knowledge of writing that this field produces and teaches. There is some content knowledge, for example, that the *Framework* and the *WPA Outcomes Statement* present as content that writing students need to learn (such as how to understand a rhetorical situation).

<sup>57</sup> HSLDA, Cathy Duffy, Home School Curriculum Advisor, and Secular Homeschool all mention BW.

including books by Peter Elbow and Ann Lamott and attended a writing conference after an email exchange with Peter Elbow. Therefore, while she is not a composition specialist with intimate knowledge of the field, she is more knowledgeable than Pudewa or Kautzer and Oldar. In fact, her status may be more closely aligned with many adjunct college writing instructors who are sometimes vaguely familiar with some composition scholarship but are not particularly invested in the field. This is a powerful ethos for Bogart to have because it allows her to relate to homeschooling parents not just as a fellow homeschooling parent but also as someone familiar with the expectations of college writing from an insider perspective. She isn't guessing about what writing students will have to do in college because she knows what writing some college students are doing.

Bogart's strong ethos may be one reason that BW has experienced growth in popularity over the past few years, particularly as homeschooling parents seek a writing curriculum that focuses simultaneously on students' individual voice and writing habits that will help students succeed in college. In 2011-2012, BW grew 30-35% with 2000-2500 students taught in its online courses (Bogart). The curriculum is also the strongest seller on the Homeschool Buyers Co-op that serves almost 100,000 homeschooling families (Bogart) and BW's Facebook page has from 2012-2013 gained over 1100 "like"s to reach 2800 followers. Therefore, although it has been around for thirteen years, BW is currently experiencing growth in popularity. *TWJ* can be used with students from ages eight to eighteen and is intended to inculcate healthy writing practices "that you'll use for the rest of your children's writing lives" (x). If students are in high school and are

comfortable with writing, then *HHS* can be started without using *TWJ* (*HHS* i). However, if students aren't at this point, then Bogart recommends that they start with *TWJ* regardless of their age. This lack of attention to levels and, instead, focus on students' personal development mirrors the approach to writing found in both *IEW* and *WS*. Unlike both of these curricula, however, *BW* pays much more attention to how homeschooling parents can inculcate a love of writing in their children and help them develop their own unique writing voices. Its less formulaic approach asks homeschooling parents to help students use writing to explore their world and their perspectives without following checklists to structure their writing. The *BW* approach becomes more structured in high school as shows homeschooling parents and children how to structure ideas into academic writing, but it stresses more than *IEW* or *WS* that these are flexible forms rather than rigid models.

These three curricula illustrate some of the available types of writing instruction available to homeschooling parents. As can be seen in these descriptions, the creators of the curricula have various non-specialist writing instructor statuses that affect how homeschooling parents regard their ethos and their approaches to writing instruction. The curricula vary in the ways they handle private and public concerns, sometimes privileging public writing concerns such as form (*IEW*), sometimes privileging personal development (*WS*), and sometimes trying to privilege both (*BW*). Flexibility about when to use these curricula according to students' development levels and their future writing needs are central emphases of all these curricula, potentially keeping parents from a rigid following of curricular structure, even though these are present. In the following sections,

I discuss four particular aspects of writing instruction found in these curricula: overall pedagogical models, approaches to writing and argumentation, approaches to style and grammar, and transitions to college writing. These illustrate how non-specialist writing instructors tell other non-specialist writing instructors, homeschooling parents, to teach writing to their children through the lenses of overlapping private and public concerns. Although choosing a writing curriculum may seem like the most private decision homeschooling parents can make, it is often undertaken through public discussions as I have already described, and writing curricula often direct parents to consider how writing instruction in the home will transition to writing instruction in college. These public aspects of curricular decisions necessarily guide how homeschooling parents and their children approach writing.

### *Overall Pedagogical Models*

All three of these curricula have particular pedagogical models that they present to homeschooling parents as the method by which writing should be taught. Examining these shows us what factors differentiate curricula that spur parents to make personal decisions about what pedagogies fit in with their own approaches to education. Institute for Excellence in Writing is one of only a couple writing curricula to implement videotaped classes with at-home curricula as I discuss earlier in this chapter.<sup>58</sup> The main focus of this curriculum can be seen in the title of its curriculum for parents: *Teaching*

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<sup>58</sup> Essentials in Writing is another. Some homeschooled students may take video distance courses, but IEW and Essentials in Writing are different in that instruction is intended to take place primarily at home with the videos serving as teachers for some material that parents reinforce with students.

*Writing: Structure and Style*. Throughout *TWSS* as well as *Student Writing Intensive Level C*, lessons revolve around ways for students to structure ideas and source material and to incorporate stylistic techniques into writing. The idea of writing that IEW passes along to homeschooling parents, then, is that writing skills only involve putting ideas into certain forms and making them sound intelligent. The curriculum assumes that students already have ideas, or that they will quickly develop ideas, that can be turned into a piece of writing by plugging them into a specific structure and adding specific stylistic techniques. In other words, writing is reduced to form and style in very formulaic ways rather than including idea development, considerations of audience and genre to guide decision-making, or even revision. Breaking down writing this way may be comforting for homeschooling parents who can easily assess what IEW asks students to do, but it does not account for the complicated process of producing complex writing.

*TWSS* for homeschooling parents teaches them how their students can learn to write, and it is intended to be used by parents of all ages of students. The teaching of structure and style is very similar for all levels of *SWI*; only the difficulty of readings and pacing changes. The structures are taught over and over again “with more advanced source materials and with an increased expectation in sophistication and quality of output” (*TWSS* 1). As discussed above, writing in IEW is thus seen as a skill that improves over time as the same pedagogical methods are repetitively used. If students are unable to complete one level in an entire year because teaching is adjusted “to meet the age, ability, and interests of the children” (*TWSS* 1), IEW recommends starting over and working more quickly through that level in consecutive years. Pudewa says that “students

must practice writing daily” (TWSS 1) in order to gain writing fluency, and he claims that his approach is “writing across the curriculum” because content comes from other areas of study so that writing can be focused on without being distracted by course content (TWSS n.p.). This view of writing, however, completely ignores the ideas being communicated through writing in its attempt to focus solely on writing instruction. The conversations about the content of writing courses in composition studies illustrate that the connections between content and writing in writing instruction is not an easy issue to deal with.<sup>59</sup> As can be seen in IEW, however, completely divorcing content and writing can lead to reductive views of writing. The intention behind IEW’s pedagogical model is to allow students to focus on writing, but IEW does not present writing as a subject or content in itself but, instead, as a way to arrange “thoughts” about another topic even as homeschooling parents are taught to teach their children to write about all topics in the same way (TWSS n.p.).

*SWI Level C* emphasizes the importance of moving at the student’s pace and changing the curricula to fit the student, including switching out texts so that students can write about things they are learning in other classes. Strangely, this approach does not lead to either “writing to learn” or “learning to write” approaches.<sup>60</sup> Students are not

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<sup>59</sup> See chapter one for my discussion of these.

<sup>60</sup> The first of these, writing to learn, is characteristic in WAC or WID initiatives. This is largely focused on using writing to help students learn about a subject as well as to show what they know about a subject (McLeod). For example, political science students might write an essay about Barack Obama’s economic policy, incorporating concepts they have learned in the course into the essay. Learning to write, the second of these, teaches students about writing and focuses on writing skills as the content of the course. Students in writing courses structured in this way read about ways people can effectively construct writing and analyze writing to better craft their own writing.

writing in order to learn about other subjects nor are they learning to write in the sense of developing their own ideas and then producing written work about these. Instead, homeschooling parents and students are taught that writing involves taking something a student already knows about and structuring it in particular ways without any additional thinking about these ideas before writing begins. The workbook claims, “One of the keys to our program is the Composition Checklist. This document serves as a clear assignment sheet with objective grading criteria so the student knows exactly what is required of him [sic]” (n.p.). These are extremely basic sheets, with areas for what the assignment is, the due date, and check boxes for stylistic techniques and formatting. Notably nonexistent are content or written elements for students to focus on, such as how ideas relate to the ways they are structured or expressed. In IEW, structure and style are focused on to the exclusion of content about writing or anything else.

Although many homeschooling parents praise the ease and effectiveness of using IEW, some have problems with its pedagogical model. One of the main critiques of IEW by parents is that it is too structured. For example, on a Facebook conversation on The Old Schoolhouse Magazine about IEW in May 2013, one homeschooling mother commented, “I’m one of very few out there who didn’t like this program. I found the techniques to result in very stilted, formulaic writing. I prefer methods that allow more natural flow of thought.” As will be seen in my analysis of how IEW teaches both structure and style, IEW uses checklists to help students write and keep track of how well they are following instructions about structure and style. These checklists, however, can result in unoriginal, formulaic writing, and even IEW notes that structure is “rigid” while



style is “fluid” (TWSS 1). Stylistic fluidity is still guided by rules, however, that structure in some ways how students may communicate ideas. Discussions of structure and style do not revolve around issues of writerly intent, subject, audience, or even the ideas students want to convey; instead, IEW presents rules for students to follow about how to write that are disconnected from the subject they write about. On the DVDs when Pudewa teaches actual co-op classes to show his interactions with students and to make students at home feel like part of a class, it is apparent that students focus much more on following his rules than on what they are writing. For example, when discussing the use of short sentences, one of the stylistic techniques students are asked to use, one student asks if the sentences can each have two words instead of each having three (as in Pudewa’s example). Pudewa says that’s fine, but it’s apparent from this question and others that students following IEW can become much more caught up in the rules Pudewa presents than in the writing they are doing. These rules are both the reason many homeschooling parents find the curriculum easy to use and the reason that some do not choose to use it. Either parents are reassured that they can teach writing by following these rules, just as they would teach students math by teaching them rules, or parents are constrained by these rules and unsatisfied with the writing their students produce by following them.

WriteShop is very similar to IEW, focusing on structure and style through the use of checklists. Instead of completely eliding the writing process, however, WS guides homeschooling parents about how to teach their children to go through a revision process and about how to grade their work. This is more practical instruction for parents than

IEW provides, perhaps because WS does not offer an intermediary instructor as IEW does on the DVDs. Parents are completely in charge of their children's writing when using WS. Because parents are connected so deeply to their children's writing instruction and because WS wants to extend the life of its curriculum beyond just one year for each of the two student workbooks, WS provides parents with the most detailed options for adapting its curriculum to individual students' development. Both the *Teacher's Manual* and *WriteShop II* provide detailed instructions about how to use the curriculum in three different ways depending on students' needs and abilities. About these the *TM* notes:

Regardless of the track you choose, finishing the text should never take priority over teaching your students to write. The purpose of *WriteShop* is to provide ample opportunity for practice, practice, and more practice. Embracing this philosophy will serve you well . . . As long as students write and revise on a regular basis, their skills will improve. (10)

Here, WS tells homeschooling parents that the primary way students learn to write is by writing and revising "on a regular basis." This reduces their role as non-specialist writing instructors to that of assigning writing, requiring students to revise their writing, and giving feedback. It also emphasizes that writing is something that non-specialists can teach since no specialized knowledge of writing is needed beyond, presumably, the WS curriculum.

The three tracks allow homeschooling parents to choose how quickly or slowly they want students to complete the curriculum. The first option is a fast track that allows students to finish *WSII* in one year by writing one new composition over a two-week period and revising it twice in that time every day; the second allows students to finish

the curriculum in two years with some supplemental activities provided in the *TM*; and the third allows students to finish the curriculum in three years with many supplemental activities. Because WS is comprised of only two different student levels, the *TM* suggest that after a curriculum is completed it can be repeated “year after year simply by changing topics and requiring longer compositions” (6). This approach is very similar to IEW, which focuses on students learning the same writing skills over and over again with changes in readings or topics and difficulty levels rather than additional content about writing. Despite IEW and WS’s emphasis on student development, this approach to repeatedly introducing the same writing skills does not recognize that there is content about writing, such as rhetorical and genre knowledge, that students may need to learn at certain times in their education rather than simply repetitively practicing the same writing skills over many years.

Similar to IEW, WS focuses on helping homeschooling parents learn how to teach their children to write paragraphs and to use stylistic techniques. The *TM* states that the writing assignments are no longer than a few paragraphs because this helps students “to develop the foundational building blocks of good composition, which are a strong sentence and a strong paragraph. Once these skills are mastered, they will have the tools to produce longer compositions and reports” (2). Even in *WSII*, the longest essays are only three or four paragraphs. Although sentences and paragraphs may be the building blocks of essays, writing a sentence or a paragraph is not the same as writing a five-page essay, particularly in the depth of information and idea complexity often asked for. Writing longer essays does not simply involve the same skills; it requires that students be

able to develop more complex ideas and support them with more evidence. This is a difference that IEW and WS in particular fail to acknowledge, instead emphasizing that the shorter writing homeschooling parents assign their children to write can lead to essay writing.<sup>61</sup>

WS approaches writing in a formulaic way similar to IEW, including checklists that help parents and students focus on content, style, and formatting when writing and revising. Unlike in IEW, these checklists do include content areas which, even though not as detailed as other areas, at least point out to homeschooling parents and students the relationship between ideas and written communication. For almost every lesson in *WSII*, two checklists and a “Composition Evaluation” are provided for students’ writing. The first “Student Writing Skills Checklist” is for students to use to make sure they have followed instructions about content and style. The second “Teacher Writing Skills Checklist” contains similar items but has boxes for “OK” and “Needs Improvement” that parents should use to give students feedback. After completing this sheet, teachers return it to students so that students can make changes to their draft. Finally, the “Composition Evaluation” sheet is a points-based rubric used to give a grade to final drafts. WS, unlike many other homeschool writing curricula, heavily emphasizes the importance of revision

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<sup>61</sup> IEW’s *The Elegant Essay* curriculum does extend the model for paragraph writing into longer, thesis-driven essays. However, this book specifically points out that it still does not address ideas, style, mechanics, or voice even though these are essential aspects of writing (Myers 5). It narrows down the already-specific focus in IEW to just teach homeschooling parents and students about the structure or form of essays, which the book claims “undergirds all types of essays” (Myers 5). The basic problem with generalizations about how to write, including reducing writing to very specific forms, that IEW’s other curricula espouse is thus still present in this book about writing longer essays.

and evaluation based on feedback, having students go through a writing process for each composition. The importance of this process can be most seen in the *TM*, which contains sections on “Editing & Evaluating” and “Positive & Encouraging Comments.” Parents are also told, “Don’t be afraid to **mark the ‘needs improvement’ boxes**. Even the most polished first revision can improve. While we want to be gentle with our kids’ feelings, we will not benefit their writing to mark everything ‘OK’ when improvement can be made” (*TM* 93; emphasis original). This notes the difficult place parents can be in when trying to evaluate their children’s writing and draws parents’ attention to the importance of this process. The checklists still aren’t as focused on the connection between writing and ideas as composition scholars would argue is necessary, but the emphasis on the writing process is much more present in *WS* than in *IEW* or *BW*. Such an approach reinforces for homeschooling parents their vital role as non-specialist instructors in their children’s learning to write, particularly as readers who can provide feedback about what students can improve upon.

One final note about *WS* is its religious orientation. Both *IEW* and *BW* occasionally allude to religious beliefs (*BW* even contains a discussion of the difference between argumentation and apologetics in *HHS*, acknowledging that some homeschooled students are religious; see discussion later in this chapter). However, *WS* has the most overtly religious stance, espousing Protestant beliefs throughout both *TM* and *WSII*. For example, in the discussion of including positive comments in feedback, *WS* includes Bible verses to reinforce why positive comments can encourage students to work hard. More blatantly, *WSII* equates good writing with honoring God: “Your job is to learn

proper writing skills so you can communicate your thoughts on even the most sensitive topics in a God-honoring way” (26-2). This approach very clearly links religious beliefs and writing, calling on students to learn to write well as a way to honor their beliefs in God. Homeschooling parents who are not Christians could avoid most of the religious references in WS if they liked its pedagogical approach enough to warrant this decision. The integration of these religious beliefs into a writing curriculum points out, nevertheless, the importance to some homeschoolers of bringing their religious beliefs into all aspects of their children’s education, even when dealing with subjects that don’t necessarily involve religion.<sup>62</sup> This is a direct inclusion of beliefs into education, which homeschooling critics are often most fearful of. The references to religion in WS highlight how the private and public sphere overlap in writing curricula and, further, show how religion, as T J Geiger II argues, is not just a personal identity but also a public topic that people need to be willing to engage with (250). Rather than eliding religion, composition studies needs to confront what it means when religious beliefs, which can be both personal and public, overlap with writing instruction. Even IEW and BW, with their lack of attention to religious beliefs, espouse personal worldviews that not everyone agrees with (such as BW’s distinction between argumentation and apologetics discussed

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<sup>62</sup> A Beka, Rod & Staff, and Konos are three popular packaged curricula that are much more religious than WS. A Beka’s literature curriculum is advertised as maintaining “a strong Christian philosophy,” Rod & Staff describes itself as “God-honoring books, textbooks, and curriculum,” and Konos claims “It’s about passing on a vision to build families that honor God.” These publishers, whose religious orientations are much more strong than that found in WS, exhibit Christian beliefs in all of their homeschooling curricula. Unlike IEW, BW, and WS, they are much less focused on the public work of preparing students for college or work and are much more focused on the private mission of passing down certain belief systems through educational experiences.

later). Similarly, writing instructors – regardless of where they teach – often fail to acknowledge how their curricula and represent particular personal views about the world or, like some homeschooling parents, embrace their ability to teach their students certain perspectives. The point here is that all writing teachers overlap personal and public concerns in their writing instruction that influence what, how, and why students learn to write.

BraveWriter has a very different approach to writing that focuses much more on homeschooling parents helping students to develop ideas about things they already have some knowledge of as they develop their own unique writing voices. Bogart's goals for students are confidence and competence in writing, no matter how long their individual development takes (Bogart). To help students achieve these goals, BW structures its main text, *The Writer's Jungle*, as a set of guidelines for parents to help them teach writing to their children and structures its text for high school students, *Help for High School*, as a more instructive text that speaks directly to students rather than parents. Unlike IEW and WS which are structured in lessons, *TWJ* contains chapters written to parents about different techniques and assignments to help children learn to write; these are meant to provide parents with an overall pedagogical approach that they can implement in different ways throughout their children's schooling. *HHS* is more structured since it is written to students, with information being clustered into modules. Students are still supposed to implement these as they can because a time frame is not given for completion. Such a loose approach to the curriculum allows parents to focus more on

their children learning certain writing skills and developing as writers rather than on when a unit or module is supposed to be completed.

Bogart also provides information to parents about how to recognize different writing stages their children will go through. She claims that student writing development progresses through “The Natural Stages of Writing Growth” and tells parents not to worry about when students begin writing or at what stage they are as long as they “move through the stages of growth natural to most writers” (*TWJ* 151). Such an attitude is difficult to maintain in an era governed by tests, even for homeschooling parents if they are preparing their students for college and face the pressure of looming standards that will determine whether their children will be accepted into particular postsecondary institutions, but Bogart relentlessly maintains that writing should be allowed the freedom to grow without being constrained into “known writing forms” (*TWJ* 153). Her pedagogical approach emphasizes to parents the importance of allowing their children’s writing to develop naturally without placing undue emphasis on skills that they aren’t yet ready to learn. This approach also resists telling students to structure their writing into any form until their writing begins to naturally move in this direction. In this freeform approach, BW differs from both IEW and WS.

A necessary dynamic in this approach to teaching writing is the parent-child relationship that places parents in a mentor role to help their children learn to write and develop their own voices. Bogart posits that “Writing growth occurs over many pieces of writing, not all at once in the current piece” (*TWJ* xxiv), something that composition scholars would agree with, especially as WAC and WID programs gain prominence to



reinforce the need for students to write at many different stages of their education for different purposes. Unlike IEW, BW discourages parents from having their children write every day because it takes too much out of children to focus on generating new ideas while also learning spelling, handwriting, and punctuation: “Our kids need more time to absorb information and make connections between subjects than we adults do” (*TWJ* 5). Homeschooling parents are pushed to see ideas and idea development as a necessary part of the writing process as BW presents it. Before children reach age twelve, Bogart suggests that the most important thing is “to guard their enjoyment of writing” by requiring “less original writing” and encouraging them “to interact with writing that’s already written” (*TWJ* 6). Doing so, she believes, helps children to appreciate and enjoy writing before they must learn structures of writing such as the essay that they will be expected to know in college and elsewhere. Homeschooling parents are pushed to take an expansive view of writing in the early stages especially, allowing freedom to students to explore their ideas in writing without pressuring them to face limitations such as those that IEW and WS reinforce.

Much of both *TWJ* and *HHS* is taken up with showing parents and students how to generate topics, which BW emphasizes is a very important first stage in the writing process. Although BW does not reach the point of focusing on genre or rhetoric explicitly, it does acknowledge much more than IEW or WS the importance of students developing topics that they then structure into a piece of writing. She claims, “brave writing starts with having something to say and then finding the best way to say it” (*HHS* i). This approach draws more productive connections between content and writing that

impress upon homeschooling parents the importance of their children developing ideas before they begin to write. Drawing on Peter Elbow's work, BW extensively focuses on freewriting and generating thoughts from which to narrow down topics to write about. When choosing topics for an essay, Bogart advises students to freewrite every day until they find a topic they care about: "The feeling of caring is the single most important part of essay writing . . . Caring equal enjoyment. Enjoyment produces better writing and high quality research" (*HHS* 83). The pedagogical approach espoused in BW connects personal involvement in a topic with the writing process, asking homeschooling parents to wait for students to find something they actually care about before they begin writing (a luxury many students cannot enjoy).

Unlike IEW and WS, BW also recognizes the importance of audience in writing; Bogart claims that effective writing is "about getting the stuff that's in my head into yours so that you think, feel, see and perhaps even believe what I've written . . . The reader has the final say about whether or not the writing actually communicated anything" (*TWJ* 18). Such a perspective grants readers a lot of power, which seems to contradict BW's focus on the writer, but it forces attention away from writing as a formula for ideas to writing as a communicative process. The role of the audience is largely ignored in other writing curricula for homeschoolers and asks homeschooling parents to consider who their students are learning to write to and how they can best communicate with audiences in writing, a central goal of writing according to BW. Even as BW moves away from the formulaic approaches to writing that IEW and WS ask homeschooling parents to use, it also seeks to help homeschooling parents and students

understand how ideas are written in order to communicate our thoughts with others. This is a complex process to teach that BW does by showing homeschooling parents how to help their children develop and write ideas rather than by using checklists. Although Pudewa claims that homeschooling parents using IEW can move students away from the checklists once their writing no longer needs this structure, Bogart chooses to reveal to students how open writing is from the start: “There are no hard and fast rules about what an essay is – just general agreement about what they achieve” (*HHS* 164). She illustrates this approach by allowing writing to be messy until high school when she begins to show students how to turn their potentially disordered writing into structured arguments. Despite her insistence on children moving through stages of writing at their own pace, Bogart recognizes that there are certain expectations for high school writing that will help students prepare for college writing. *HHS* asks homeschooling parents to become more familiar with these expectations and to help students as they transition from writing that is largely concerned with their own thought development to writing that is intended to communicate ideas in academic contexts.

These three writing curricula for homeschoolers, therefore, espouse three different pedagogical approaches to writing that homeschooling parents can buy into. IEW maintains focus on a formulaic approach to structure and style; WS uses a similar approach while also emphasizing the feedback and revision process; and BW takes a completely different approach by focusing on topic development and voice before moving on to structure. Homeschooling parents choosing writing curricula do not always understand these approaches, particularly if they purchase curricula after only a cursory

glance at a curriculum fair or a look through the limited online sample pages. After using curricula, however, homeschooling parents realize what pedagogical approaches to writing they are being asked to use with their children and then determine whether they will continue with this approach or switch to another. These decisions are often based on how well a curriculum's overall approach mirrors their own concerns with both private and public interests, including their students' development and college preparation.

### *Approaches to Argumentation*

Institute for Excellence in Writing, WriteShop, and Brave Writer all present homeschooling parents with different ways to teach their children argumentative writing, although these do not always resemble what composition scholars would see as argumentative essays. Instead, parents and students learn particular ways of structuring ideas that typically involve both private and public concerns. These approaches may seem very formulaic, particularly since IEW and BW both promote a form that most postsecondary writing instructors are intimately, if not painfully, aware high school students learn: the five-paragraph essay. Most college writing instructors view the five-paragraph essay as limiting and formulaic. However, Milka Mustenikova Mosley, a high school English teacher, argues that using formulas helps both students and teachers in high school English courses because students learn basic techniques in writing and teachers can grade "more efficiently" (58). The compulsion to get through grading quickly is not one that homeschooling parents face since they teach many fewer students

than high school English teachers,<sup>63</sup> but their non-specialist status means that using formulas can be extremely helpful in breaking down how to teach students to write. Without a strong background in composition scholarship that could help them develop a more complicated understanding of writing pedagogies, homeschooling parents are provided with clear methods to teach writing when formulas are used.

IEW relies on a very structured approach to argumentation, including the five-paragraph essay, which Pudewa alternately calls the “Aristotelian model” (*TWSS* n.p.) and the “basic essay model” (*SWI* n.p.). As composition scholars know, this model presents an introduction with a thesis outlining three topics, three body paragraphs covering these topics, and a conclusion repeating what has been covered. Pudewa claims that Aristotle identified the human need to hear things multiple times in order to remember them and claims that this model is still valid and taught as the “foundational idea of all advanced writing” (*TWSS* n.p.). Despite his emphasis that this is only one way to write an essay rather than *the* way, his presentation of this model to parents and students does not allow for students to use other forms. In fact, Pudewa says that longer papers are simply an expansion of this model, composed of two, three, or more five-paragraph essays put together (*TWSS* and *SWI* n.p.). Clearly this is a simplistic representation of writing an essay, which won’t always fit into this structure. Pudewa acknowledges that the five-paragraph essay is only one way to write and that it is a step

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<sup>63</sup> Kunzman, as I later discuss, points out that writing instruction could be a strong point in homeschooling students’ instruction since parents have more time to give their children feedback than teachers have to give their students. This argument fails to account for the non-specialist status of most homeschooling parents, which limits their knowledge about how to provide feedback on their children’s writing.

to helping students move on to using other forms, which aligns with Mosley's insistence that formulaic writing can help high school students learn how to structure ideas.

Nevertheless, he does not give homeschooling parents any indication of why he chooses to focus on the five-paragraph model or how students can move beyond it if they outlive its purpose while still in high school. Without this commentary, some parents may not understand how this formula constricts ideas, forcing ideas into a particular structure that does not always, or even often, best serve the arguments students make.

The five-paragraph structure is not the only way IEW constricts the writing that homeschooling parents are taught they should reinforce with their children. The building blocks of these essays are key words and key word outlines, which Pudewa presents in both *TWSS* and *SWI Level C*. This is a very rule-bound process of determining what students will talk about and in what order. It is also what IEW presents to parents and students even before it discusses writing. The first step is students learning to take key words from a source text, which Pudewa says can be any kind of text: "The most important thing is that you start with something that is at or below their reading level so that it is easy for them to use" (*TWSS* n.p.). *SWI* provides some very basic readings for students to practice with and then supplies lessons in which students outline readings their parents give them. Parents have ways to tailor this process for their individual students' development by choosing readings appropriate for their reading levels.

Constructing key word outlines from these readings is very rule bound: students are instructed to write down a number for each sentence in a text and then to write "three or four . . . key words" from each sentence beside the numbers. Pudewa tells parents that

they should not allow students to choose more than three or four words per sentence. Once students have done so, they test how good these outlines are by writing paragraphs based on these outlines alone. In this way, they end up with one paraphrased paragraph per paragraph in a reading. This is a process that parents have students repeat with narrative stories by answering questions with key words and that they later repeat with lectures and longer readings by identifying a certain number of “facts and notes” that they need for a report and then identifying “what is interesting or what is important” from a source (*SWI* n.p.). At this point, students make key word outlines from complex texts using fairly specific rules: only 7-10 facts per paragraph and only 3-4 key words per fact (younger students take down fewer facts). To help guide parents in this process, Pudewa says that 8-9 facts should be taken per ten minutes of a lecture or per one page of a text (*SWI* 51). These may be helpful guidelines for homeschooling parents and students, but the resulting writing (as heard on the DVDs) is quite bland as some parents criticize. Homeschooling parents learn from IEW, and consequently pass on to their children, that writing only involves finding information to write about, even down to the amount of information students should include regardless of what they are writing about and why.

After homeschooling parents teach students this process, they help students create a “fused outline” from various sources. To do so, Pudewa instructs students to “highlight key words in the topic and the clincher” sentences of source paragraphs (*SWI* n.p.). They do so with three sources about apes that are provided in *SWI*. Once they have these key word outlines with one set of key words per paragraph, they identify overlaps between sources and Pudewa instructs them to avoid “skimpy” topics that are only discussed in

one source. At this point, students take more detailed key word notes from paragraphs in each source related to the topics they decide to write about as they did before, choosing fewer facts per source so that information from different sources about the same topic can be combined into the same paragraph (he still limits them to 6-10 facts per paragraph, even with multiple sources). Students then write from this outline. Unlike BW, which covers some aspects of MLA citation, IEW fails to discuss the importance of citing sources or even to note that citing sources matters. This is a problem since the five-paragraph essay that IEW teaches parents and students is composed mostly of information from sources. Homeschooling parents would have a difficult time understanding that citation is an important process for students to gain familiarity with or to give them feedback on source use when IEW boils using sources down to extrapolating key words to write about. In general, IEW focuses much more on creating key word outlines and writing from them than on developing the writer's ideas, even if they relate to a source. IEW notes that the conclusion should give "an opinion or idea of the author about something" and that the "why is very important," but this is much more of an afterthought than an integral part of its approach to argumentation.

In addition to these techniques, IEW also provides rules about writing paragraphs. *SWI* tells students that each paragraph must have a topic sentence and a clincher sentence. These two sentences, Pudewa claims, "must repeat or reflect two to three key words" so that paragraphs "stay on topic" and have "cohesion" (n.p.). Pudewa also claims that titles should be taken from the "two or three most dramatic words" in the last sentence of an essay; if students don't have dramatic words in the last sentence, he suggests changing it



to help create the title. This also seems aimed at creating cohesion and the illusion, at least, of a sophisticated paper. Because of the emphasis on structure, the writing techniques IEW presents focus so much on rules to create structure that it overlooks how students can use structure to help them think through their ideas or vice versa.

Homeschooling parents would not be given the impression that helping students develop ideas or opinions about source information is an important part of the writing process when they use IEW. In discussions of argumentation, the public act of conversing with others through a written work, as displayed through source integration, is elided in favor of a formulaic mimicry of this process. In particular, homeschooling parents are not given tools to push their children to consider their own ideas and how these interact with other ideas, skills that composition scholars consider essential to persuasive writing.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike IEW and BW, Write Shop does not offer students the five-paragraph essay model. Unfortunately, it does not offer them any model with which to develop essays. Instead, the focus on paragraph and sentence writing results in students being assigned essays no longer than three or four paragraphs, even in *WSII* for high school students. In a lesson about timed essays in *WSII*, WS recommends that essays be 12-15 sentences and 2-3 paragraphs. The main focus in this lesson is on timing rather than structure, although they do state that “As a rule, these kinds of essay questions only require students to list

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<sup>64</sup> For example, the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* outlines several habits of mind that IEW fails to teach homeschooling parents to foster in their children’s writing instruction because of its formulaic approach to writing and source use, including curiosity, openness, and creativity. Curiosity, for instance, involves the ability to “seek relevant authoritative information and recognize the meaning and value of that information” (528). IEW is not interested in students’ evaluating sources in this way, focusing instead on how students can quickly extrapolate information from sources.

the main points in paragraph form for the purpose of answering the question. The points usually do not need to be developed and expanded” (TM 90). Such advice unfortunately does not align with some essay tests, which ask students to provide at least some evidence for ideas presented. Methods of outlining sources to write reports are presented, although this resembles IEW’s method of creating key word outlines and writing from these without as much instruction provided as IEW gives. The general approach to argumentation in WS is, thus, a very condensed version of IEW that fails to provide parents and students with a solid sense of how to create structure in an essay.

Other confusing aspects of argumentation arise in *WSII* in addition to the advice about timed essays. In a lesson called “Exaggeration,” students are assigned to write a paragraph about a resort that is meant to cast its features in an ideal manner. The student workbook notes, “*The purpose of this assignment is not to teach you to deceive! Rather, it is to make you aware of the power of words to influence and entice. This exercise helps you stretch your creativity as well as your awareness of advertising techniques used to persuade*” (20-2; emphasis original). However, the examples given – including describing “the dried up remains of a pond” as a “refreshing lake” (20-2) – are certainly deceptive. Later, WS describes the aim of persuasive writing as “to convince your reader to accept a certain belief or follow a course of action” (*WSII* 24-1), but students may equate deception and persuasion by this point since the previous lesson presented persuasion in this way. Therefore, the presentation of persuasive writing in WS is much more conflicted and confusing than in either IEW or BW because it attempts to justify potentially deceptive ideas. Further, parents and students still have to deal with rules

about how many sentences should be in paragraphs and how many paragraphs should be in compositions as well as how many points should be provided for each main point (at least two). This very formulaic approach not only present conflicting information but also presents seemingly ambiguous rules about how to put together an essay.

Unlike IEW and BW, *WSII* includes various worksheets and graphic organizers to help students brainstorm. A lot of emphasis is placed on this stage of writing; rather than using freewriting as BW does, WS uses these charts and graphs to help students determine what to write about. For example, to help students write comparison and contrast essays (which are two paragraphs), an empty Venn diagram is provided so that students can see how two things are similar and different. When discussing choosing a topic, *TM* notes that worthwhile topics should “*have significance to the reader*” (84; emphasis original) and *WSII* tells students “to select a topic that will make you think critically about important issues” (27-2). Such reminders are intended to help students focus on the more public aspects of writing, which involve communicating ideas with others. Before writing, students are told to read about their topics and to talk to their families “to help gain perspective” (*WSII* 27-4). Such an approach isn’t as open as BW presents (see my later discussion), but it does acknowledge that students should engage in a public process of idea development before beginning to write. *TM* tells parents that students can write about topics they are already studying, which they call ““writing across the curriculum”” and describe as killing ““two birds with one stone”” (85). This view of writing mirrors IEW’s focus on including content from other areas in writing, although it

fails to recognize the difference between “writing to learn” and “learning to write” that IEW overlooks as well.

Unique features of writing that WS incorporates also include practice paragraphs or outlines that students write with parents before engaging in their own writing and the emphasis on feedback and evaluation already mentioned. In *WSII*, parents and children complete practice paragraphs together for several lessons before children move to just writing outlines with their parents before they write their own paragraphs. The curriculum doesn’t explain why these are helpful, although in lesson 21 when these are exchanged for outlines, the *TM* notes, “Beginning with Lesson 21, *practice paragraphs have generally been omitted*. Judging your own student’s abilities and comprehension of concepts, decide whether he needs ongoing practice in this area” (70; emphasis original). These directions emphasize the importance of homeschooling parents making choices in WS based on their students’ individual development and ability to write paragraphs on their own without completing practice paragraphs first, very personal decisions about writing instruction. This is also one of the few moments in any of these three curricula in which methods explicitly *change* based on students’ writing proficiency; IEW, BW, and even WS often simply note that parents should alter the difficulty level or quicken or slow the pace of work depending on their students’ abilities. This moment breaks with the assumption that writing instruction should be the same all of the time with repetition as the mode of learning and acknowledges that instruction should sometimes change to meet students’ development.

Despite the emphasis on collaborative writing and feedback, however, *WSII* does not offer high school students enough experience with structure to adequately prepare them for college writing. Kautzer and Oldar acknowledge this in their recommendation that high school students should learn “how to write a business letter, a research paper (complete with bibliography and footnotes), and longer, more in-depth essays” (*TM* 6). Of note, these are all more public genres than the very short, often personal writing that WS asks homeschooling parents to teach their children. Therefore, writing in high school is assumed to become more public and, in some ways, more complicated. They also indicate that such instruction is not available through WS and must be sought elsewhere. Because WS does not offer the instruction they claim high school students need, offering *WSII* as a high school curriculum may be inadequate for some home schooled students who could transition from this curriculum to college writing courses without adequate considerations of essay writing and research. This is particularly important because they could fail to understand differences between private and public writing, particularly in expectations public audiences may have for writing, such as clear evidence or support for claims, that they and their parents may not be concerned with. WS, therefore, offers homeschooling parents some techniques to help students develop as writers, such as writing with them until they are able to write on their own, but it fails to account for the public goals of writing that high school students often move toward as they prepare for college writing.

Similar to IEW, Brave Writer focuses on more public goals than WS, providing homeschooling parents and students with ways to help students gain academic writing

skills. These mostly appear in the *Help for High School* book, which is clearly geared toward older students preparing to enter college. The focus on voice and more personal writing is not ignored in this curriculum, but it is less central than in *The Writer's Jungle* intended for younger students. BW, like IEW, uses the five-paragraph model, which Bogart also calls the expository essay or "Classical essay" model, to help high school students learn how to structure their ideas. She claims that this is "The most versatile form for academic writing" and is "a student's attempt to explain" (HHS 82). Before beginning to write, Bogart recommends that students construct several thesis statements that "Attempt to change your reader's view" and "Use a reversal structure to give your thesis tension" (HHS 114); for students who are having trouble, she recommends beginning the thesis with "although" or "whereas" or with "In this essay I intend to prove" at first (HHS 116-120). These are only crafted after a very elaborate incubation period involving students' topic selection and freewriting as well as their interrogation of multiple perspectives on this topic. Unlike the skipping over of idea development in IEW and WS, BW's emphasis on idea development before writing provides homeschooling parents with techniques to help their students develop their ideas before they attempt to present these in writing. This is a more personal process that leads up to writing work that is meant to be read by other people, but it is a necessary one for homeschooling parents to understand so that they can help students who have writer's block or who complain that they don't know what to write about.

BW, similar to IEW, exerts a lot of control over how homeschooling parents teach their children to structure essays. BW provides the number of points, which Bogart

defines as “the main statements that tell me why your thesis is true,” and particulars, which she defines as “the bits of information . . . that prove your points,” that students should include in their essays (*HHS* 123). BW also relies on a system of threes – three points for one thesis and three particulars for each point – and recommends that students “only use one quote per point” (*HHS* 126). One example, however, includes only two points with two particulars each, which Bogart says works if particulars are “substantial” (*HHS* 126). It is not clear what something has to include in order to meet this criteria, but it does provide a bit of freedom from this very specific structure. In order to gather particulars, Bogart suggests using note cards to organize information, but her discussion of this process is not very detailed (unlike IEW’s discussion of working with sources which, while formulaic, does provide guidance about how students should read sources). However, unlike IEW and WS, BW does include a module in *HHS* about paraphrasing and summarizing sources as well as a module about citing sources using MLA. These are important sections for students in high school to be exposed to given the citation expectations in college writing for students to integrate and cite the sources they draw upon. Bogart also acknowledges that “there is a growing trend” against the five-paragraph essay because it is “too rigid or wooden” (*HHS* 137). Defending it by arguing that it is a necessary step before students move on to the use the essay structure “in an original and personal way” (*HHS* 137), this discussion shows more awareness of current discussions of form in composition scholarship than in IEW. Nevertheless, homeschooling parents are taught to stringently structure their students’ writing even as they are encouraged to give up control over how their students discover ideas to write

about. BW, therefore, allows high school students in particular the freedom to develop ideas of their own, a precursor to what they will be expected to do in college writing, while it also creates a frame within which students should place these ideas as they learn how to write longer and more complex texts than in *The Writer's Jungle*.

Homeschooling parents are asked to give up a lot of control over the ways their students discover and develop ideas. Once parents provide their students with techniques to help them develop their ideas, they must trust their students to brainstorm and follow through on their own thoughts. IEW in particular and even WS do not reinforce to parents how essential this partial relinquishing of control is. In fact, IEW asks parents to always control what students are doing, even down to reinforcing the number of ideas they can develop to write about. The BW model of writing, even with high school students who Bogart pushes toward increasingly public models of writing, relies on a period of “incubation” (*HHS* 2) and exploration during topic selection. For example, *HHS* contains eight modules about choosing topics and exploring them before the module about essay writing begins. These modules do not just offer freewriting exercises, such as those proposed by Peter Elbow that Bogart has read; they also push students to consider different perspectives about topics. Bogart claims learning about various viewpoints, a way to encounter the different points of view about a topic in circulation in the American public sphere, is one of the most important things for teens to gain experience with: “Teens are expected to investigate the internal logic of arguments and contrasting viewpoints when reading about a subject” (*HHS* iv). Unlike IEW, which focuses on sources as simply pieces of information to write about, BW calls attention to the critical



thinking that reading sources can help students to perform. Homeschooling parents who reinforce these skills also reinforce the importance of their students considering multiple perspectives, a form of introducing them to the many ideas at play in the public sphere. Therefore, BW asks homeschooling parents perhaps most complexly to bridge the personal through idea formation and the public through the consideration of many points of view.

The very explicit connections BW makes between writing and entrance into the public sphere, most clearly seen in a section delineating the differences between apologetics and argumentation, is a controversial aspect of *HHS* that highlights the impact of personal beliefs on curricular decisions homeschooling parents make. Bogart tells homeschooled students (and their parents who read this curriculum) that faith-based arguments may not work in college because other readers don't hold the same beliefs, providing a discussion of what constitutes "support" in an academic environment (*HHS* 9). Later, Bogart claims,

As you get older . . . it becomes more and more important to seek out a variety of perspectives about the ideas and beliefs you hold. The world is much larger than your family and local community. In order to chat it up with other people, and to argue intelligently for the things you hold dear, you first have to be aware that there are lots of other well-supported positions and ideas. (*HHS* 70)

She acknowledges that this can be "scary or threatening" for families, yet she insists that it is an important part of becoming an "independent thinker" (*HHS* 71-72). What Bogart is actually talking about is the struggle Jeffrey M. Ringer recounts in "The Consequences of Integrating Faith into Academic Writing" of writing students to maintain their beliefs

in absolutes when their encounters with others push them towards a pluralistic view of society. In this view, all perspectives are equally valid, calling on writers to move away from arguments that depend on evidence that is based on one set of religious beliefs. Bogart reinforces the need for high school writers to prepare for college expectations that they will consider a pluralistic view of society. However, not all homeschooling parents are willing to engage their students in this process as they hold onto their own personal beliefs. In an interview with Bogart, she said that some parents decide not to purchase the curriculum or return it because of these discussions of religious beliefs and argumentation. Although composition scholars may find BW more informed about public concerns than IEW or WS, some homeschooling parents cannot reconcile their personal beliefs with these public goals, which even Ringer admits is a complicated process for students. When the personal and the public collide, often one has to give way. Homeschooling parents encounter these choices as they choose writing curricula, and they must determine what best fits their family's needs as well as their children's goals.

#### *Approaches to Style and Grammar*

The fact that writing curricula show us how private and public interests intersect when they discuss argumentation may seem obvious; however, these curricula also illustrate these overlapping concerns in their approaches to style and grammar. None of these writing curricula include explicit grammar instruction, either taking a relaxed approach to grammar or directing parents to teach students with a separate grammar program. Institute for Excellence in Writing and WriteShop both offer grammar tips in addition to the stylistic techniques discussed here whereas BraveWriter de-emphasizes

grammar. All three curricula, however, do recognize the importance of style in writing. Their approaches to style usually mimic their approaches to argumentation, reinforcing the pedagogical aims of each curriculum and further reinforcing to homeschooling parents their particular views of the role of writing instruction in addressing both personal and public concerns.

In IEW, homeschooling parents and students are taught that style is a set of techniques that writers add onto writing rather than an integral part of the construction and revision of ideas as composition scholars such as Paul Butler and Star Medzerian argue. As may be expected from its approach to argumentation and structure, IEW provides homeschooling parents with a rules-based, structured method to style.

Throughout *SWI Level C*, Pudewa teaches students five “dress-ups,” seven “sentence openers,” and six “decorations” to use in their writing. He emphasizes that stylistic techniques and structural lessons do not correspond; instead, stylistic techniques should be taught one at a time, giving students time to master one before adding another (TWSS n.p.). According to Pudewa, this process is called “fluent natural ability” (TWSS n.p.).

High school students, who may be more advanced, may be able to start with three or four and move more quickly through these than younger students, but they all learn the same stylistic techniques. The first lesson in *SWI Level C* that introduces stylistic techniques teaches all five dress-ups at one time. The workbook tells parents, “This is a huge number of dress-ups to learn all at once. If your student is finding this difficult, reduce the number of dress-ups required and reintroduce them later” (25). Once students learn these techniques, they appear on the checklists students use to check their writing, and Pudewa

instructs students to mark these on their essays through the use of numbers, underlining, etc. This pedagogy asks students to be deliberate about how they use style, but it also teaches them to use style in a very formulaic way rather than allowing students to use style in unique ways that may be more appropriate for their writing. IEW also fails to acknowledge differences between types of writing and the appropriateness of various styles of writing, except for a quick mention in *TWSS* when Pudewa tells parents that they can refine these moves later by talking about when these should and should not be used. Even in *SWI Level C*, the most advanced core curriculum, however, these differences are not explained to students and parents, unless they assume primary teaching responsibilities from the DVDs, may not reinforce this point with their students.

The purpose of all the stylistic techniques is, according to Pudewa, to make writing sound “professional” (*SWI* n.p.). He compares them to jewelry because students shouldn’t use too many or too few (*TWSS* n.p.). Pudewa claims that the first techniques presented are called dress-ups because of the similarity between “style and clothing” – these are used “to dress up our writing a little bit” (*SWI* n.p.). Dress-ups include using an “-ly” adverb in a sentence, using who/which, using a strong verb, using a quality adjective, and using an adverbial clause in the middle of a sentence. Once students learn these, Pudewa tells them that they must use each of these in every paragraph they write for the rest of the course. In *TWSS*, Pudewa acknowledges,

I do not believe, nor do I teach, that this list of stylistic techniques is the formula for a perfectly written paragraph . . . I do require my students to use every technique I have taught them in every single thing they write until one of two things happens . . . They will leave my control . . . [or] I could have a student who is better at using all of the stylistic techniques than I am, and in that case the

student has essentially mastered and has graduated from the requirement and is free to use the techniques as he [sic] sees fit in the future. (n.p.)

A similar acknowledgement very quickly appears in *SWI Level C*: using all the dress-ups and sentence openers in one paragraph isn't the only way to write a paragraph but this requirement is for "practice" so that later "you can do them or not do them as you feel that you should" (n.p.). This quick note in the midst of learning these, however, may lead parents and students to think that, in fact, the only way to think about style is as a list of things to add to writing. Certainly continued practice of these techniques affects how students think about style as a formula and as elements to make writing sound professional rather than as an important aspect of choices they make about writing and idea development.

The sentence openers and decorations in IEW are similarly presented and governed by rules. Sentence openers include subject, prepositional, "-ly," "-ing," clausal, very short sentence (less than five words), and "-ed." Pudewa tells parents and students that each of these should be used once per paragraph unless a paragraph is shorter than six sentences (the "-ed" opener is optional). Some room is created for variance here because Pudewa says students shouldn't let their need to use sentence openers define how many sentences they have, but he adds that in longer paragraphs it is still necessary to use a variety of sentence openers, adding "no more than two of the same in a row" (*SWI* n.p.). Decorations are required less often, only "one or two at most per paragraph," so that writing can look "A little bit more fancy, a little bit more professional" (*SWI* n.p.). These include a question, a quotation/conversation, three short sentences, dramatic open and

close with two short sentences to start and end a paragraph, simile and metaphor, and alliteration or assonance of the beginning three words of a sentence. Some of these Pudewa notes other teachers may not like, including the three short sentences and alliteration/assonance. Unfortunately, he fails to address why teachers may not like these techniques, such as that the desire to structure writing in this way may prioritize style above content. To help students with these techniques, the workbook contains lists of words such as adjectives and strong verbs for them to consult as they write. Incorporating all these rules about stylistic techniques into writing can easily become an exercise in checking boxes off a checklist rather than a consideration of how style impacts writing and readers. Additionally, students who learn to write this way may have a difficult time writing without thinking about these techniques, even when it is necessary or more important for them to focus on what they are writing about than how they are writing it (e.g. in first drafts of papers) or when the writing they are doing should employ different stylistic techniques (e.g. a lab report). These techniques end up being a strange mimicry of those that writers use when writing for others and trying to draw them into their writing; this is often an attempt to reach certain publics, but in IEW the rhetorical nature of these decisions is reduced into formulas.

Similarly, IEW also reduces paragraph and grammar considerations to rules about writing. Pudewa tells students to avoid using “I” in essays and, instead, to “disguise their opinion as one of the facts” (*SWI* n.p.) they write about. He claims that “Very few serious writers or essayists . . . tell you ‘I think, ‘I feel’” (*SWI* n.p.), so students shouldn’t say these, either. Such advice is often given to high school writers but is a gross

generalization of the style of “professional” writing, which changes depending on the field, publication, genre, etc. IEW also very quickly discusses paragraph length, but only to point out the average paragraph length of high school students (100 to 120 words) and to tell students that longer or shorter paragraphs are fine (*SWI* n.p.). Surprisingly, IEW fails to recognize paragraph length as a stylistic or argumentative choice as it does with sentence-level choices. Such an oversight may be due to the short length of the essays assigned, but given IEW’s rules about other aspects of writing, this lack of attention to paragraphing is strange. It may be that since writing is structured around outlines that prescribe the number of sentences in a paragraph, Pudewa does not see a need to discuss paragraphing further. IEW occasionally teaches grammar,<sup>65</sup> but Pudewa’s attitude towards grammar is often antagonistic. For example, when he asks students on the DVD what a verb is and one answers an “action,” he tells them that this is a “dangerous” grammar book rule (*SWI* n.p.). He also tells students that adverbial clause is an “ugly” phrase and that they don’t have to know what it is “to do one” (*SWI* n.p.). In the case of IEW, grammar is subordinate to style, which is merely a way for students to make their writing sound professional. Homeschooling parents using IEW may be unsatisfied with its lack of attention to grammar, but discussions online between homeschooling parents about writing curricula indicate that they often require their students to learn grammar from a separate curriculum. When this occurs, grammar is divorced from writing, contradicting composition scholarship about how to handle grammar instruction and

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<sup>65</sup> When teaching the “-ing” sentence opener, for instance, he discusses in detail problems that could arise with it, including how a dangling participle or misplaced modifier can occur if students aren’t careful about syntax (*SWI* n.p.).

reinforcing the idea that grammar is merely about presentation of ideas rather than the shaping of ideas.<sup>66</sup> Style is also about making writing appear “professional.” Style and grammar in IEW are thus a public concern for parents and students to develop in the home, but a public concern that fails to account for the ways that ideas evolve and audiences react as sentences and words are structured in different ways.

Write Shop similarly focuses on stylistic techniques and provides rules about how students should use these when they write, replicating IEW’s quasi-public concern with style and grammar. Stylistic techniques appear on checklists very similar to IEW’s, and usually style elements for students to check off as they write and for parents to check off as they provide feedback and grade their children’s writing outnumber content elements. For example, on the “Teacher Writing Skills Checklist” for the “Opinion Essay,” the content category contains seven categories for teachers to assess students on whereas the style category contains twelve, one of which includes eight different sentence varieties for students to use, and the mechanics category (that includes things such as length, inclusion of drafts, and basic sentence construction) includes eight (*WSII* 25-25).

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<sup>66</sup> In parochial schools, which are heavily influenced by parental input, grammar is often a central component of English instruction divorced from writing. For example, in “But When Do You Teach Grammar?” David Gold recounts his process of developing a process-based English curriculum in a private Floridian high school. This was made more difficult by parents’ concerns about the lack of explicit grammar instruction, which this school had previously focused on. Eventually, these concerns were dispelled as Gold and his colleagues worked to communicate with parents about the ways the new curriculum taught grammar as students learned to write. Homeschooling parents sometimes have similar concerns about grammar instruction, but many writing curricula they use do not dispel these by discussing or showing how writing and grammar instruction can be mutually reinforcing. See also Haswell, “Error and Change”; Kolln and Gray; and Murdick concerning the relationship between grammar instruction and writing instruction.



Although quantity does not always indicate attention paid to these categories, in the case of WS it leads homeschooling parents and students to focus on stylistic elements more than content. Unlike Pudewa's open, albeit brief, admission that there are different ways to write, WS admits that there are other ways to write in *WSII* when it changes a rule about using "to be" verbs. Rather than telling students to completely avoid them as it previously had, the curriculum now tells students they are allowed to use up to five because "you will devote more mental energy to organizing your material and thinking critically about your subject. While it still remains important to use interesting sentence variations, it is more crucial for you to focus your thoughts on developing your topic in an organized manner" (*WSII* 25-10). This is a different move from IEW, which maintains that all students must continue to use stylistic techniques until their writing has moved beyond them. WS tells homeschooling parents and students that it is difficult to pay attention to both idea development and style and grammar at the same time as composition scholars have noted in thinking about the frequency of grammar errors when students stretch beyond their typical ways of thinking about or structuring ideas.<sup>67</sup> WS also admits that counting "to be" verbs is "an unrealistic exercise when you begin to write lengthy essays and reports," but it has students avoid them thus far to create "awareness" about using them (*WSII* 25-10). Parents are instructed, "As sentence variation choices are left more and more to the student, your job is to see that he [sic] still uses an adequate variety. He [sic] should use several variations more than once" (*TM* 81). Homeschooling parents, therefore, are supposed to focus on style and grammar even as

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<sup>67</sup> See Haswell; Carroll; and Sternglass.

students move beyond it. Despite the lack of direct discussion of stylistic variances at this point, the style category on checklists after this lesson are based on general areas of style – organization, fluency, style, parallelism, vocabulary, conciseness, transitions – rather than on specific rules. This is a better move towards stylistic flexibility than IEW provides students, even though it occurs late in the curriculum. WS provides parents and students with more flexibility in writing than IEW, showing parents how its curriculum can be modified as students mature as writers. Such moves boost their personal attention to students’ development while also continuing to reinforce the attention paid to style and grammar, concerns often more socially important.<sup>68</sup>

To teach style, “Skill Builder” sections are included in many lessons. These “usually ask your students to practice a skill they will apply to that week’s writing assignment” (*TM* 13). Like IEW, WS emphasizes that students should “complet[e] the assignment correctly” before moving on because they build on each other (*TM* 179). The first few lessons in *WSII* contain refresher Skill Builders that quickly teach students sentence variations, such as adjectives, alliteration, prepositional phrases, adverbs, appositives, personification, and so on. These are similar to those IEW teaches students, and they are added to checklists until Lesson 25 as noted previously. Lesson 25 supplies a Skill Builder about parallelism that the *TM* tells parents should be learned as students write opinion essays. Emphasizing the importance of parallelism, the student workbook

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<sup>68</sup> The social importance of style and grammar can be seen in comments today that students don’t write often enough or know how to write. In particular, people talk about students’ texting and online discourse as ruining their writing when, in fact, this generation writes perhaps more than those in the recent past if we include social writing, whether online or through other electronic devices, as forms of writing.

defines it as “a pattern of repeated, similarly constructed phrases or sentences” that help students “add clarity, eliminate confusion, and avoid awkwardness” (*WSII* 25-17). Skill Builders such as this one often include sample sentences for students to rewrite using the stylistic technique they are learning before integrating these into their own writing. While providing homeschooling parents and students more instruction about style and grammar than IEW, WS still initially teaches these outside of the contexts of students’ own writing, which does not line up with current composition scholarship about grammar instruction (see previous discussion). When homeschooling parents are taught to see content and style and grammar as separate, they pass this view on to students who learn that these stylistic techniques impact how people read a piece of writing, not what the writing says.

Different types of lessons highlight the importance of stylistic techniques and grammar in WS. Both the *TM* and *WSII* contain a glossary of sentence variations that are intended to create “a more interesting composition” (*TM* A-4). Although these aren’t integrated into *WSII* lessons, they provide a list of ways to start sentences (similar to IEW’s sentence openers) with examples. Homeschooling parents presumably would teach these to their children on their own. The *TM* also includes a section called “Common Problems of Mechanics” that illustrates “some of the most common errors of grammar and punctuation” so that parents can look for these in students’ writing (131). A disclaimer is offered with these: “This is not intended to give complete instruction but to simply offer examples. Please refer to your English handbook for further clarification. If you see repeated problems, address them with a grammar curriculum” (*TM* 131). Plurals

and possessives, homonym confusion, fragments, run-on sentences, incorrect use of commas, and misplaced modifiers are covered in this section. Because homeschooling parents are not universally knowledgeable about grammar, this list has limited use as a list of errors for parents to mark in their students' writing. A list of "Common Proofreading Symbols and Terms" is also provided in both the *TM* and *WSII*, presumably to help parents and students as they give feedback and edit writing. The inclusion of this list highlights the importance of "Learning to edit," which *TM* claims is "fundamental" to this curriculum (3). Since explicit grammar and punctuation instruction isn't provided, learning to edit would presumably come from another curriculum.

The last lesson in *WSII* about timed essays tells parents, "It is also important for you to check her mechanics, since errors will count against her in many such tests" (*TM* 90). This is a singular admission of one reason grammar and mechanics matter, although no explanation of why they matter in standardized tests is provided. Such additions to *WS* represent its attention to grammar, attention that is not explained in the context of writing. *WS* replicates *IEW*'s approach to style and grammar to a large extent. The popularity of doing so may indicate the difficulty of teaching homeschooling parents to help their children learn about style and grammar; without the use of checklists and rules, homeschooling parents, who are largely ignorant of grammar instruction and composition scholarship about grammar instruction in writing, do not have much of a basis for teaching these aspects of writing. In general, homeschooling parents learn from both *IEW* and *WS* that style and grammar are important, but that they need to find a different curriculum to teach them and their students specifics about putting together sentences.

Divorcing writing and grammar in this way, while similar to methods in parochial schools (see earlier footnote), does not well serve students learning to write.

Homeschooling parents would likely have little knowledge about composition scholarship, however, that could help them take a more complicated view of style and grammar. Without this knowledge or a different kind of curriculum, they continue replicating popular ideas about style and grammar instruction.

Brave Writer takes a different tactic when thinking about style and grammar that is less formulaic but also less specific. Allowing homeschooling parents more freedom to structure style and grammar instruction can help parents tailor BW to their children's needs, but it also offers them less advice about what their children should be learning as they prepare for writing experiences beyond high school. As can be seen in the way BW presents writing in general, this curriculum is very focused on each student developing "a distinct voice," which Bogart claims is one aspect of good writing (*TWJ* 43). Defining voice as "the preservation of the writer's personality within the confines of ink, paper and information" (*TWJ* 119), she notes that most homeschooling writing curricula don't discuss voice at all, which is certainly true for both IEW and WS. Therefore, BW does not offer rules about stylistic techniques students must incorporate into their writing. Instead, it uses activities such as talking and freewriting to encourage students to develop ideas in their own voices, which necessarily will impact their writing style: "Over time, as your child learns how to revise verbal communication into the more streamlined demands of writing, his [sic] writing voice will become a lovely blend of his personality and the peculiar needs of written communication . . . and those two will fuse naturally

without needing so much revision” (*TWJ* 120; ellipses original). Bogart offers parents advice for helping students to consider word choices once they begin to shape freewriting into essays or more structured forms. One of the ways she does so is through her emphasis on the acronym PEN – or precision, economy, and novelty – in word choices. She claims that parents and students should look for words “that fulfill these principles” when they try to improve word choices (*TWJ* 137). To aid in this process, she includes a list of “Words worth converting” and a list of “academic” words that should be replaced with simpler words (*TWJ* 138-139) to avoid jargon or obfuscation of ideas. BW recommends focusing on words apart from writing so that students can enjoy word play, although this splitting of content and style mimics some of the problems that students using IEW may have with understanding the connections between content and style.

In *Help for High School*, BW briefly discusses how word choices and voice relate to academic writing as parents and students begin to look toward college writing expectations. The brevity of this discussion may still be an issue, though, for homeschooling parents seeking more definite advice about the style of writing and grammar expectations students will experience in college. *HHS* is even less focused on style than *TWJ* because much of *HHS* is focused on helping students develop topics and then write about them and because Bogart emphasizes students starting with *TWJ*, presumably to provide them with a foundation of techniques to help them develop their personal writing style. Bogart discusses PEN in relation to academic writing specifically and claims that “the amount and quality of the detail” in writing is one of the biggest differences between spoken and written language (18). She also briefly discusses the

importance of transitions, the integration of “creative skills” and “academic writing” (*HHS* 144), and words to avoid in academic writing (contractions, slang, idioms, and special language) (*HHS* 166). This comprises, however, her integration of style with academic writing for high school students. For those who do not start with *TWJ*, they may not have an adequate preparation with Bogart’s activities about voice to fully understand how it is an important aspect of writing according to her pedagogy.

Homeschooling parents may find that *BW* does not offer enough particular advice about the style(s) of writing their children will be expected to produce in college, even though it offers sound advice for helping students develop their own styles. In this case, private interests outweigh public concerns in this curriculum.

*BW* does not ignore the impact of mistakes on readers, particularly as students grow older and prepare for college writing. Bogart acknowledges that readers are impacted by spelling: “Spelling makes the biggest subliminal impact on the reader of your entire piece,” separating someone “from the backwaters of a bayou” from “an esteemed college graduate” in the minds of readers (*TWJ* 102). This classification of those who use language is reductive and stereotypical, but it does more to point out the rhetorical impact of spelling, in this case, on a writer’s ethos than *IEW* or *WS*. There are also some grammatical elements that Bogart recommends students need to have learned by high school, although she cautions that most students “retain little more than the ordinary constructions and markers” if they learn grammar out of context (*TWJ* 99). This admission marks her familiarity with composition scholarship, even if this knowledge is not consistently communicated through the *BW* curriculum. Some of the elements she

recommends focusing on include identification of complete sentences; uses of capitalization, end marks, quotation marks, apostrophes, and commas; and problems with comma splices and run-on sentences (*TWJ* 102-104). These are mistakes that can impact how well ideas are communicated and how clearly readers can understand what writers are saying, both of which envision writing as a public enterprise that is intended to reach others. For students who particularly struggle, Bogart suggests looking at several pieces of their writing to make a list of typical mistakes and then to choose three to work on over several months before moving on to others (*TWJ* 108). This approach to grammar is in line with current composition scholarship that tells teachers not to overwhelm students by asking them to tackle too many problems at one time.<sup>69</sup>

At other times, especially when BW speaks directly to parents about separate grammar instruction, BW is less in tune with composition scholarship about the relationship between writing and grammar. Bogart claims that grammar “has very little to do with writing” and “everything to do with understanding the science of language and making sure that you use standard American English when you write,” recommending that students focus on grammar only “once in elementary school, once in junior high and once in high school” (*TWJ* 16). This is certainly much less than IEW or WS recommend and not as much as students in most public and private schools would study.<sup>70</sup> The biggest problem, however, is the complete divorce of grammar from writing, reducing grammar to “standard American English,” which isn’t clearly defined, and failing to tell

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<sup>69</sup> See Lindemann.

<sup>70</sup> They advise having students engage in a separate grammar curriculum throughout their education.



homeschooling parents how grammar can greatly impact not just readers but also ideas. None of the writing curricula, therefore, adequately discuss the connections between grammar and writing; instead, all three tell homeschooling parents that these are separate subjects, writing and grammar, that only influence each other as a result of their being used at the same time. As IEW and WS feed into and BW works against popular misconceptions about writing and grammar instruction, they all attempt to help parents and students navigate personal and public concerns in different ways. IEW and WS do so by asking parents to focus on public concerns with grammar instruction and BW does so by telling parents not to worry so much about grammar and to focus instead on students' development as writers.

Ultimately, Bogart claims, "The goal is to teach your child to hear what he [sic] writes" so that he or she can learn to correct his or her own problems (*TWJ* 89). BW's approach to style and grammar, a more contextual approach than IEW or WS, asks parents and students to understand how these are built into writing rather than added onto writing. In other words, BW draws attention to style and grammar even as it seeks to help students absorb these as they learn to structure their thoughts in writing. In breaking away from the structured approach to style that IEW and WS provide, BW helps homeschooling parents push their students to develop as individual writers even as this approach is less easy to teach since it is not as rules-based or reliant on checklists. As non-specialist writing instructors, homeschooling parents have to navigate debates about writing, style, and grammar instruction as they choose a writing curriculum. Even after making this choice they still have to determine what they believe this relationship should

be and how they will approach writing, style, and grammar given what these curricula communicate about these. Parents concerned with their students' development as writers may take BW's approach to improving students' voices and ideas whereas parents concerned with their students' transitions to college writing may be inclined to go along with IEW and WS's more typical focus on style and grammar as ways to "dress up" writing or make it "sound better." No matter which approach homeschooling parents choose, they must make deliberate decisions about what they prioritize – personal or public – and how these overlap even as they develop writing instruction that caters to these concerns.

### *College Writing Expectations*

While teaching homeschooling parents about writing instruction and sometimes directly instructing students, writing curricula also often provide parents with pictures of public venues for writing outside the home that students will be expected to enter into. College writing specifically is often alluded to as these curricula communicate to parents and students what colleges value about writing and how students can learn to meet these expectations. Institute for Excellence in Writing and Brave Writer both explicitly pay attention to college writing, including this public concern as one of the main ideas they communicate to parents and students. Write Shop focuses much less attention to college, barely mentioning any expectations students' writing will be held up to or what they will need to learn in order to be prepared for college writing. As homeschooling parents seek to balance both their students' personal development as writers and their need to prepare

their children for future writing experiences, these three curricula illustrate how such needs overlap, complicating the relationship between writing in private and public spaces.

One other thread runs through discussions of college writing in these curricula, which is that first-year writing courses exemplify college generally and college writing specifically as if these were homogeneous things. Postsecondary institutions have many different missions and curricula that impact what they teach and why. For example, first-year writing curricula at religious, liberal arts institutions often do not resemble first-year writing curricula at large, state institutions. Although composition scholars have attempted to define universal first-year writing course outcomes through the *WPA Outcomes Statement*, Emily Isaacs and Melinda Knight report that “the WPA OS has not been broadly adopted or even adapted by our nation’s colleges and universities” (300), despite their optimism that many schools integrate some aspects of the WPA OS into their writing curricula. In addition, repurposing first-year writing as freshman seminar courses or as core courses in learning communities proliferates the general view that first-year writing is also an introduction to college, including advising students, teaching students how to access email and course management systems, and giving students a crash course in college expectations.<sup>71</sup> Such ideas about first-year writing are at work in popular culture and even composition scholarship; it is not surprising, then, that they are also spread to homeschooling parents in these curricula. Despite the prominence of these opinions, such leveling of college and college writing does a particular disservice to non-

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<sup>71</sup> See McNenny for a discussion of a first-year writing course linked to a career discovery course as an example of this mindset.

specialist writing instructors such as homeschooling parents who may not have research and other experiences through which to filter these positions and who may offer writing instruction under the assumption that if they follow certain pedagogies, their students will succeed.

IEW provides homeschooling parents with a version of college writing that is more about structure and appearance than ideas, which would be misleading if students matriculated to postsecondary institutions where writing instruction was rhetorical and context-based. In other words, at institutions where the WPA OS is implemented, this instruction may not provide homeschooled students with the skills they need to succeed, even though Pudewa may seem knowledgeable to parents. IEW often mentions college, discussing it through Pudewa's own memories of going to college. It is evident from his rhetoric about college that he sees it as a necessary but not entirely fruitful step to being successful, more a hurdle to get through than a valuable experience. At one point, for example, Pudewa asks students on the videotaped class what to do if a teacher asks for an essay of 2000 words and he whispers, "Drop the class!" (SWI n.p.). Students laugh and he says, "Maybe not," but his comment indicates a view of college courses governed by difficulty rather than knowledge acquisition. College writing is viewed as sometimes unnecessarily difficult, even though 2000 words is not a particularly long essay.

Pudewa also presents college coursework as something not always valuable or necessary, playing into beliefs homeschooling parents often have about how traditional schooling wastes students' time with busywork. He tells parents that he bought Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* in college but never read it. Clearly, Pudewa's

approach to college is simply to get through the system. Pudewa also tells homeschooling parents that college professors – whom he always indicates with the masculine pronoun “he” – are not particularly qualified for their jobs. This caters to parents’ status as non-specialist instructors, reinforcing the lack of specialized education needed to teach writing. For instance, when talking to students about using the word “obviously” to make readers feel “stupid,” he recommends not using it often “in papers for your history professor, right, because you don’t want your history professor to feel as though you feel that he’s, well, you know. Even if he, well, is, you know” (*SWI* n.p.). In addition to spreading the idea that not all college professors are intelligent, Pudewa also claims that writing teachers, regardless of what level of students they teach, have their own idiosyncratic rules about writing. He tells the story of his daughter using three short sentences in a row in a seventh grade paper, a stylistic technique IEW advocates; her teacher circled these and wrote “too choppy.” Pudewa says he told his daughter there wasn’t anything else in the paper to remark on so “he had to make some comment” (*SWI* n.p.). This is a blatantly casual attitude toward a teacher’s feedback, which indicates Pudewa’s feeling that the teacher was driven to find mistakes rather than to help his daughter with her writing. This also subtly tells parents that if other teachers don’t like the writing skills students learn through IEW, it is the teachers, not IEW, that are wrong. Homeschooling parents are thus told that many aspects of college writing are subjective and up to professors with dubious qualifications to teach writing.

Assessment and grading, an area often seen as subjective in writing instruction, is discussed by Pudewa to further emphasize the subjectivity of college writing teachers and

to point out some tips to use to help students succeed when they go to college. He tells parents that they should tell their students “don’t try to write well” because “you will only be happy part of the time because professors don’t care if you think you’re writing well. They want you to write well in their concept. Unfortunately, they have different styles,” which means that different professors give the same paper different grades (TWSS n.p.). The subjectivity of writing instruction rather than various goals for writing that shape how teachers grade writing are emphasized here, simplifying a complicated process. Pudewa suggests that students make “an individualized style checklist for each teacher” and use it when writing for that professor so that “each professor will read the paper” and think it is “well-written” because it is in their style (TWSS n.p.). His failure to recognize why the same paper would receive different grades, particularly if read by professors in different disciplines, fails to push homeschooling parents to consider the different kinds of writing their students will complete in college. Although his tactic of making a list for each teacher could be useful, it ultimately tells parents and students that writing professors make arbitrary rules about writing. Pudewa similarly presents other tactics for college writing. When talking about taking titles from key words in an essay’s last sentence, he claims, “Usually professors will find this to be a very, uh, skillful thing to do even in college papers. They’ll like your titles and they’ll say ‘oh, classy.’ They won’t know that it was a secret trick that someone taught you somewhere along the way” (SWI n.p.). As homeschooling parents specifically consider the public value of writing,

particularly in college, IEW teaches them that this value is arbitrary and subjective rather than historically-bound and rhetorical.<sup>72</sup>

Because homeschooling parents may not have much experience with college themselves or have experienced college years before, the ethos of those telling them about college is very important. Without a strong ethos, homeschooling parents are less likely to believe what they are told about college writing. Pudewa sets himself up as an expert about what students can expect in college by discussing his own experiences, although these may not be more immediate than those of the parents he speaks to. Some of his more general advice includes that students write in their books when they read them, that they learn how to take notes from a live lecture, and that they talk to someone immediately after learning new material to help them to retain it longer. This is sound advice, although it does blend writing instruction with general college skills (see previous discussion of this phenomenon). But Pudewa also tells students questionable information about what happens in college: “In college, if you turn in a paper with no name, do you know what that means? Instant F. They just throw it away and don’t tell you you didn’t

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<sup>72</sup> It should be pointed out that assessment, particularly the assessment of standardized writing tests, often leads students to tricks such as these that Pudewa suggests that will give them high marks in college. As Maja Wilson and Michael Niemczyk point out, writing instruction that goes beyond these standardized values is rare in public high school education as teachers (and computers) who grade writing are increasingly asked to pay attention to appearance rather than idea development. IEW is not, therefore, necessarily out of line with the focus public schools place on these elements of writing. However, because homeschooling parents often choose to homeschool their children to escape such standardization, particularly to focus on their students’ personal development, IEW’s failure to offer an alternative view of writing instruction is perplexing. IEW also does not provide homeschooling parents with views of the different kinds of writing valued at the college level, not many of which rely on writing models that work for standardized tests such as the SAT.

turn in your paper because, of course, they didn't know who it was" (SWI n.p.). Such a harsh attitude may be true for some professors, but it certainly isn't the case for all (including myself). Therefore, the discussions of college that IEW includes indicate that Pudewa knows that some of its students will matriculate to postsecondary institutions and that the writing skills they learn will need to transition to these new environments, indicated when the TWSS claims that it "provides a solid foundation for exceptional performance in high school and university" (1). Unfortunately, the overgeneralized and harsh characterizations of college give parents and students the wrong impression about the subjectivity of writing feedback and the reasons teachers assign writing good and bad grades. Doing so means that parents may improperly devote attention to some aspects of instruction, such as titles, while ignoring others that may be more significant in certain programs, such as rhetorical dexterity. The version of college that homeschooling parents envision in IEW is a harsh and also intellectually lifeless place where good writing is not constituted by good ideas written well but by tricks that students use to appear intelligent.

BraveWriter also constructs a picture of college writing expectations for homeschooling parents based on Bogart's ex-husband's experiences as an adjunct writing instructor and her own experiences as a philosophy instructor. BW asserts that *Help for High School* "will both satisfy the requirements of high schools and universities as well as empower you to retain and cultivate your writing voice" (11). From her discussions of college, it is clear that Bogart knows more about college writing than Pudewa, although



she isn't completely invested in current composition scholarship.<sup>73</sup> Unlike Pudewa's generally negative view of writing in schools, Bogart simultaneously discusses the rigidity of writing in schools with some of the benefits it can offer. On one hand, she claims that writing in schools is limiting (*TWJ* 34) and that "Homeschool is a great way to learn the art of incubation because you *have time* unlike your bus riding peers" (*HHS* 2; emphasis original). On the other hand, she admits that writing has more value when it reaches readers beyond parents or teachers and that schools can help with this through writing competitions or compiling writing for an entire class. To aid with this, she says homeschooled children need to be given similar opportunities to share their writing (*TWJ* 112). Her views toward writing in schools aren't entirely positive or negative, presenting a more balanced view of what both these environments can offer writing instruction than Pudewa acknowledges.

One interesting aspect of Bogart's discussions of high school and college writing is her view about what writers at this level of development can be expected to do in their writing. Situating discussions about who humans are, why we exist, and "the nature of living" as "The Great Conversation," Bogart claims that most people aren't prepared to enter this conversation until they are at least twenty-five and then they do so through contributing to "a field of study" (*TWJ* 160). Since young people aren't ready to enter this conversation, she believes that students in middle school "eavesdrop" on the conversation and that "High school and college deepen our appreciation for the thinking of these

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<sup>73</sup> In addition to Peter Elbow, Bogart references Nancy Sommers, Anne Lamott, and William Zinsser as well as C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon as influences on her approach to writing pedagogy.

experts” (*TWJ* 160). Bogart tells this to students directly, saying, “You will never have enough education as a high school student or undergraduate in college to be able to write original research and thinking. Your job is to report the findings of other academics, scientists, researchers, and analysts in a precise and greatly reduced form” (*HHS* 16). The way student writing stands out, according to BW, is through personal connections with the subject, unique arguments, or fresh perspectives (*HHS* 16). Unlike composition scholars who are often caught up in what students *should* do,<sup>74</sup> Bogart focuses on what students *can* do developmentally in their writing at different stages. Doing so fits with homeschooling parents’ concerns with their students’ development and fitting writing instruction to meet their level of preparation while also concretely defining stages for parents to consider their students passing through as they write in high school and college. Thus, her portrait of college writing meets parents’ concerns about both personal and public concerns.

Like Pudewa, Bogart builds her ethos as an expert in college writing largely based on the experiences of Jon. She presents parents with a list of ten writing elements that Jon developed for his college freshmen and that she says high school students should use regularly in their writing: start in the middle, appeal to known experiences, include figurative language, incorporate powerful verbs, master the mechanics, use sentence variety, repeat key terms, include dialogue and quotes, credit sources, and integrate effective transitions between ideas (*TWJ* 123-125). Some of these focus on sentence-level concerns and some focus on higher-level concerns of the presentation of ideas and other

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<sup>74</sup> See Sullivan; Sullivan and Tinberg.

sources. She also presents practical advice about writing, such as that essays for college classes are usually four to six pages (*HHS* 81) and that in college, “essays are longer than five paragraphs and the structure is less obvious (the transitional markers are more creative)” (*HHS* 138). The first isn’t always true, but it is a good average of the paper lengths students can expect to encounter, particularly in their first year or two of college-level work. Understanding that students will likely receive writing instruction in college, Bogart reassures parents, “If, for some reason, they [students] haven’t written many essays before college, let me reassure you. All college freshmen must go through a composition class as part of their curricula. They will be taught the essay again and they’ll be older when they do it. So they will likely do just fine” (*HHS* 159). She overlooks here the possibility that students won’t have to complete this course (because they place out or take it in an altered form, such as a freshman seminar course as previously mentioned) and her attitude about writing minimizes the importance of writing before college, but she provides parents with a much better understanding of what writing will actually occur in college than IEW. Her picture of college writing is more concrete and defined, offering homeschooling parents clear goals to help their high school students reach before their writing must cater to college writing expectations. Simultaneously, BW acknowledges developmental aspects of writing expectations, providing parents with some ideas of how college instructors will view the writing their students do. All college writing cannot, of course, be homogeneously characterized in these ways, but BW clearly illustrates how private and public concerns overlap as homeschooling parents consider the preparation of their children for college writing.

Unlike both IEW and BW, WriteShop barely mentions college or school, focusing much more on the interactions between homeschooling parents as teachers and their children than on how parents can prepare their children for college writing. The only lesson in which college is explicitly mentioned in *Write Shop II* is the final lesson about writing timed essays. The student workbook tells students, “You will have many occasions to write timed essays throughout high school and college. Knowing how to write a well-planned, organized essay is clearly a valuable asset. Challenging topics will not intimidate you once you have gained confidence in the skill of essay writing” (30-1). WS assumes that students will go on to college, but the lack of discussion about the writing students can expect to do in college or how this curriculum may help them transition to college is notable. When discussing comparison and contrast essays, WS also briefly mentions future writing expectations: “The ability to make comparisons and contrasts is important in many areas of your schooling. In years to come, you will be asked to write about the similarities and differences among people, places, and ideas you have read about” (*WSII* 27-1). College is not discussed in particular here, but the implication is that these skills will transfer to post-high school environments, including college. The lack of discussion of college writing expectations may be because *WSII* is not viewed as the last level of writing in high school before students transition to college (due to their recommendations to find other sources to teach report writing and more advanced writing to high school students). Without discussions of these expectations, however, WS fails to offer homeschooling parents a clear trajectory for what their students need to learn about writing as they prepare for college.

IEW and BW both attempt, in different ways, to illustrate how the writing students learn in these curricula can prepare them for the writing they will perform after high school. Without similar discussions, writing curricula such as WS do not serve college-bound students as well. Homeschooling parents need to consider how private and public concerns mesh and conflict, particularly since they are solely responsible for their children's instruction until they graduate high school. As non-specialist writing instructors, writing curricula are an important way they can learn about these concerns. When curricula ignore the overlaps between private interests such as student development and public interests such as college and work writing expectations, homeschooling parents may not be as well-informed about the many reasons they should teach their children to write and how their children may use writing in their futures.

### **Negotiating the “Burgeoning Surplus” of Literacies**

Although choosing a writing curriculum is one of the most personal decisions homeschooling parents can make, parents do not simply pick a curricula they or their children like. Instead, they face an array of competing pressures that impact this decision, including what they and their students want from a writing curriculum but also including what preparation they perceive their students need for future writing experiences, particularly in college. Institute for Excellence in Writing, WriteShop, and BraveWriter help parents negotiate these pressures in differing ways. IEW and WS similarly offer formulaic pedagogies that focus on stylistic techniques. They resemble what Mosley describes as the formulaic pedagogy that high school writing takes. In public schools, this

pedagogy is necessary, she claims, because high school teachers “have too many students and too little time for grading, so we often allow students to follow a formula to produce a product ... Otherwise, if we just assign a topic without any type of guidance to our inexperienced writers, we will receive poorly written papers that will be time-consuming to grade” (58). Homeschooling parents do not have similar constraints; they may have other children to teach at different grade levels, but they never have 150 students’ papers to grade at one time. In general, homeschooling parents may have three or four students’ writing to read and assess.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, it is surprising that IEW and WS ask students to write in a formulaic manner when one of the main reasons for this approach, number of students, is a non-issue for homeschoolers. Another reason that high school writing may be formulaic, which Mosley does not consider, is the lack of training for high school English teachers, which I have already discussed. This *is* a problem for many homeschooling parents; having formulas to follow and checklists to use helps teachers unfamiliar with writing instruction, such as homeschooling parents, teach basics of writing that, they hope, will transfer into college writing courses. Such an approach to instruction focuses on basic writing skills for students to learn.

BW’s approach is much less concerned with formulas and much more focused on individual students and how parents can help them grow as writers. However, BW’s tendency away from writing structure may not be the best way to help homeschooling parents without experience teaching writing to positively impact their students’ writing

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<sup>75</sup> A 2007 National Center for Education Statistics study found that 12.4% of homeschooling families have only one child, 27.3% have two children, and 60.3% of have three or more children in the family (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Parent and Family Involvement 2007*).

skills. Bogart claims, “Degrees in English aren’t necessary to teach writing to kids. I’m convinced that educated adults have enough know-how in the basics of written language to adequately instruct their own children in writing. Most of the writing that any of us do in our adult lives will not be in the halls of academia anyway, but in the byways of life” (*TWJ* 100). Echoing the argument from writing center scholarship that tutors can be trained “everyday” readers (McAndrew and Reigstad; Geller et al.), BW insists that those familiar with writing – including anyone who reads – can teach children how to write. This approach is less about writing skills and more about habits of the mind, such as observation, and development of a personality through writing that Bogart sees as lifelong abilities.

Despite differences in their pedagogies, IEW and BW do the most to help homeschooling parents navigate conflicting tensions between private values and public interests in literacies as they teach writing to their children. Both directly address college writing expectations and what parents need to teach their children in order to help them prepare for college writing. Some of this information may be founded on unreliable experiences, and IEW and BW do not agree on what students need to learn, but they do offer parents guidance about what college writers are expected to do and, therefore, how they can mold writing instruction to fit these concerns. Although some homeschooling parents may be fearful about the college environment or not recognize the need for college,<sup>76</sup> most simply do not understand what students will need to know about writing

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<sup>76</sup> For instance, Gary Branson, a homeschooling father, initially did not support his daughter Beth’s decision to attend college since he himself hadn’t attended college and because it seemed to him “a waste of money” (Kunzman 81). However, even he admits at

in order to succeed in college. In chapter four, for example, I discuss anxieties homeschooling parents feel about how to generally prepare their students for college expectations. Some writing curricula such as IEW and BW directly address this lack of knowledge, helping homeschooling parents to determine both what they want their children to learn and what their children need to learn if they plan on attending a postsecondary institution.

This examination of writing curricula and how they talk to homeschooling parents about writing illustrates some of the conflicts that occur not just in writing instruction but with literacies generally. Literacies, especially in the age of online writing, do not just respond to one set of pressures. They are shaped by many, often conflicting, values that are then passed on through specific reading and writing practices, even as these practices reshape these values. As Deborah Brandt argues, different literacies simultaneously exist:

Whereas at one time literacy might have been best achieved by attending to traditional knowledge and tight locuses of meaning, literacy in an advanced literate period requires an ability to work the borders between tradition and change, an ability to adapt and improvise and amalgamate. (*Literacy and Learning*, 79)

Although she particularly references workplace and out-of-school literacy experiences in this discussion, homeschooling parents and other writing instructors also must navigate between the many available literacies in the classroom that necessarily involve other literacies. For example, those who develop writing curricula have a plethora of values about writing to pull from: writing as social engagement, writing as personal

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Beth's graduation that she had accomplished a lot and that he should have supported her decision.



development, writing for a higher calling, etc. Homeschooling parents choose writing curricula that speak to the concerns they individually care about, whether these are religious beliefs, moral and ethical values, college preparation, or a number of other things. As they teach their children to write, parents shape writing instruction, using the curricula as they are told to, changing elements, skipping lessons, etc. This process can reify or transform the values of writing that the curricula teach them and their children. Students then learn to write in ways shaped by competing concerns – at a macro level when values of literacies at work in our society impact the development of curricula and at a micro level when parents choose curricula and teach their children. Their views of literacies, therefore, are shaped and transformed by the writing instruction they receive. If they learn that structure and form is more important than idea development and voice, they carry these values with them until they encounter a new set of values about literacies. In the midst of this process, teachers and students constantly read and write, particularly online, which also influence how they view and value literacies both in and out of writing classrooms. Brandt claims, “Being literate in the late-twentieth century has to do with being able to negotiate that burgeoning surplus” of literacy (*Literacy and Learning*, 89). Writing instruction involves navigating this “burgeoning surplus” as teachers and students simultaneously negotiate what these literacies are and why they matter.

Because what literacies teachers value and teach greatly impacts how students view literacies, all writing instructors must be aware of how they choose writing curricula and pedagogies and why. Articulating these decisions to themselves and their students

helps everyone understand, even if they don't agree, what they are learning and why. This is less complicated for homeschooling parents teaching their own children because they can more easily shape how their children view writing instruction and better account for individual concerns. For example, if one child decides to go to college and another does not, homeschooling parents can more easily tailor writing instruction to these students' needs than high school English teachers facing over a hundred students each year or even postsecondary writing instructors teaching from fifteen to one hundred students or more. Curricula intended for homeschoolers recognizes this relationship between parent/teacher and child/student, often speaking to both parents and students and specifically addressing how parents can work one-on-one with their children to enhance their writing skills. Even though other teachers with many more students may not have these options for personally addressing students' literacy practices, writing instructors can clearly articulate their goals for writing courses, explain curricular decisions, and help students craft individual goals for the course that considers their own personal and professional goals.

For non-specialist writing instructors, including any instructor teaching writing who has not gone through extensive training in writing pedagogy and who is not familiar with current composition scholarship,<sup>77</sup> articulating curricular and pedagogical decisions is even more important. Without a continuing check on the pulse of scholarship that drives instructors to critically examine their teaching practices, it is difficult for non-specialist writing instructors to turn an analytical eye to specific curricular or

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<sup>77</sup> See chapter one for more detailed discussion of “non-specialist” writing instructors.

programmatic writing practices that either they or others choose. Bogart's inclusion of writing professionals and composition scholarship into BW illustrates her belief that exposure to writing theories can positively impact the way writing is taught.

Homeschooling parents and other non-specialist writing instructors may be able to “adequately” teach their students to write, but doing so, and doing so well, requires effort on their part to understand what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how to adjust strategies when something doesn't work. In other words, non-specialist writing instructors need specific guidance about how private and public concerns impact their and their students' approaches to writing instruction as well as exposure to what composition scholarship tells instructors about effective writing instruction.

Writing curricula, as this chapter shows, can guide homeschooling parents and other writing instructors as they navigate private and public concerns in writing instruction. Choosing curricula is perhaps the easiest decision homeschooling parents make because ultimately the decision is up to them and, sometimes, their children. However, homeschooling parents make these decisions in a complex web of competing pressures, some personally defined – such as beliefs in the value of writing for specific purposes, including developing a writerly voice – and some socially defined – such as college writing expectations. As homeschooling parents make other choices about writing instruction, for instance the decision to place students in group writing courses as I discuss in the next chapter, these competing values become more complicated to account for and adjust to.

CHAPTER III

HOMESCHOOL COOPERATIVES: RELINQUISHING CONTROL OF LITERACY

LEARNING

In past blog entries, you've talked about religious homeschoolers. In this article, you mentioned specifically that you chose a secular co-op. When I looked at the list you provided, I was really surprised by the number of overt declarations of "Christian" and "secular" (and other designations). It sounds like there is a clear boundary between religious homeschoolers and other homeschoolers. Would it be uncomfortable for a religious homeschooler at a secular co-op? Or vice-versa? (Ivory)

This comment by Shaun Ivory, a homeschooling parent, appears at the end of a blog post written by Jennifer Hagander-Luanava, a homeschooling mother, about enrolling children in classes at homeschooling cooperatives. Alternatively called co-ops, learning centers, academic centers, and workshops, these school spaces for homeschoolers offer participants the opportunity to meet for various purposes that typically revolve around schooling broadly conceived, including classes and socialization activities. Co-ops are usually set up by parents (at least when they first begin); are taught by a variety of people, including parents, unpaid volunteers, and paid teachers; and can be attended to whatever degree parents and/or co-ops determine is appropriate. As can be seen in Ivory's comment, co-ops, like writing curricula, hold collective values and assumptions that influence the instruction that occurs in them, as is evident in Hagander-Luanava's response to Ivory:

This is an excellent question. In co-ops, the religious/secular difference really has to do with the class offerings. So in a religious co-op you will find classes taught from a Christian world view – particularly in science and history. In a secular co-op the classes aren't influenced by the religion. So it's not so much the people as the classes. (Hagander-Luanava)

Even though Hagander-Luanava insists that the classes, not the people, are the difference between religious and secular co-ops, some people in co-ops do make decisions about what classes are offered and how these will or will not intersect with religious beliefs or other values. When homeschooling parents decide to participate in a co-op with their children, therefore, they must do so after evaluation of the co-op, including what it teaches and why, who teaches, who is in charge, what rules it has, and what roles parents must take in it. Writing instruction becomes much more fraught when homeschooling parents must juggle their own values and beliefs, the values and beliefs of the people involved in the co-op, especially administrators and teachers, and their own and others' beliefs about the future lives of their children.<sup>78</sup> By focusing on literacy instruction –

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<sup>78</sup> Co-ops may seem to resemble readiness programs such as Kaplan or Ma+hnasium that offer students additional tutoring and instruction to augment their classroom instruction. In some ways, they are similar: they supplement schooling done elsewhere with the promise of furthering students' learning. However, co-ops can assume many different forms that are more or less related to schooling, including field trips, whereas readiness programs operate within the figurative, if not literal, school space. Co-ops, therefore, are much more malleable than such readiness programs, which makes the decision to enroll in them difficult for homeschooling parents who may find it less easy to assess what a co-op offers and the value of their children's participation. Readiness programs are also often aimed at either helping struggling children, helping children who need to perform well in order to attain a certain goal (such as a high score on the SAT to receive admission to a particular postsecondary institutions), or providing specific training to professionals. Co-ops, while they do provide some educational opportunities that parents cannot themselves provide their children, are less about filling in educational shortcomings and are more about supplementing what is assumed to be an already-adequate education.

including writing, reading, and speaking courses – offered in several homeschool co-ops, this chapter shows us how complicated such instruction becomes when the personal and public concerns of many people are implicated in literacy learning.<sup>79</sup>

As I discuss later in this chapter, not all homeschooling families participate in co-ops. These are not required or even available to all homeschoolers. However, many do participate in them because they offer parents more support for home instruction, they give children opportunities to participate in group instruction with other homeschoolers, and they allow children to learn in ways that they are not able to in the home. Some co-ops focus more on socialization than on formal coursework, largely ignoring how children are prepared for life after school, whereas others are almost entirely interested in providing children with preparation for college. The former type, concerned more with the personal development of children and their ability to interact with others, resembles school clubs while the latter type, concerned with the public mission of educating children, resembles the educational offerings one might find at a preparatory school. The co-op choices available to homeschooling parents reveal different assumptions about schooling and education that parents are asked to “buy into,” often implicitly but sometimes explicitly, when they enroll their children in co-ops. In examining the online presentation of several co-ops – including their mission statements and course lists and descriptions – I discuss the kinds of “buy-ins” that homeschooling parents are asked to make and what this means as they negotiate the private and public concerns invested in

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<sup>79</sup> Expanding the scope in this chapter by paying attention to courses in co-ops not limited to writing but extending also to reading and speaking allows me to better discuss how co-ops offer homeschooling parents specific visions of literacy education within which writing instruction fits.

the education of their children. Just as in any situation where many people are involved in making decisions about schooling, no one person is in charge of the education children receive in co-ops, not even the homeschooling parents. Literacy and writing instruction offered in co-ops is governed, therefore, by the collective formulation and interpretation of the uses of literacies both at home and in school and the valuing of these literacies.

Unlike decisions about writing curricula to use at home that I discussed in the previous chapter, decisions about writing instruction in co-ops are not usually in the parents' control. Even in smaller co-ops where decisions are jointly made by all parents who have children in the co-ops, it is not often that one parent can determine what students will learn. Instead, parents make decisions together. If parents serve as teachers in the co-op, individual parents tell others what they plan on teaching so that this syllabus can be approved or modified before actually being taught. In this way, some parents could have more control over certain aspects of the co-op, including particular classes, but their children take classes from other parents.<sup>80</sup> As I discussed in chapter one, control in education is highly contentious, with government, companies such as Pearson, administrators, teachers, parents, and even students struggling to assert control over what, how, and when students learn. Homeschooling parents who participate in co-ops must surrender some control over their children's education, even though students typically

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<sup>80</sup> Children could also take courses from their own parents, although some co-ops actively discourage or even prohibit this. Because co-ops are intended to provide instruction from other teachers unlike the instruction children can receive at home, parents do not typically teach their own children. Sometimes, however, particularly in smaller co-ops with fewer parents to teach, this situation is unavoidable.

only take co-op courses once or twice per week. As Anthony, who studies four homeschooling families involved in one co-op, claims:

Families used the cooperative to address several problems associated with home schooling, such as the difficulty of preparing and teaching all of a child's classes and social isolation of the children. The parents took advantage of a division of labor in teaching and evaluation. The cooperative also allowed the families to teach their children the classroom skills they needed if they went to college. By participating in the cooperative, parents gave up some of their curriculum autonomy, but in exchange gained the expertise and knowledge available from other parents. (60)

This particular co-op, a Christian co-op based on the ancient trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, provided a variety of courses intended to supplement homeschooling with a liberal educational experience. Instead of choosing a writing curriculum based on their own values and perhaps the input of other homeschooling parents, homeschooling parents who enroll their children in co-op courses, such as those discussed in Anthony's study, must navigate the values of other parents that are communally transmitted through the co-op. Even for parents who are involved in administration and teaching in the co-op, relinquishing control over some aspects of their children's education is not easy nor should it be. The vehemence of debates about control in education speaks to how educational decisions greatly impact children and their future lives in and out of school. Homeschooling parents want to be certain that their children's involvement in a co-op will support or augment their schooling at home so that their vision of education and how it will prepare their children for life after high school is maintained even as they



experience benefits from the co-op such as division of labor and often more experienced teachers for their children.<sup>81</sup>

### **Building Schools That Aren't Schools**

Homeschool cooperatives have existed at least since the early 1990s as homeschooling populations grew and homeschoolers began seeking ways to connect with each other and offer courses they themselves may not be able to offer to their children.<sup>82</sup> A small collection of books about starting homeschooling co-ops have appeared in order to help homeschooling families begin their own, including Jane Williams's *Family Learning Cooperatives: Getting Started* in 1992, Linda Koeser and Lori Marse's *The Complete Guide to Successful Co-oping for Homeschooling Families* in 1995, Katherine Houk's *Creating a Cooperative Learning Center: An Idea-Book for Homeschooling Families* in 2000, and Carol Topp's *Homeschool Co-ops: How to Start Them, Run Them, and Not Burn Out* in 2008. In addition to narrating stories about successful co-ops, these offer practical advice about such issues as finding other families with whom to start a co-op, administrative and legal issues such as registration fees and liability insurance, and handling growth and conflict within the co-op.<sup>83</sup> These books both indicate the popularity

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<sup>81</sup> For example, in Anthony's study teachers included doctors and engineers for science, lawyers for logic and rhetoric, pastors for theology and history, and an author/editor for composition. Clearly this collective experience provides a more thorough education for homeschooled children than the experiences of only one or two parents can.

<sup>82</sup> For further discussion of the homeschooling movement's growth, see chapter one.

<sup>83</sup> I do not here delve into these issues because they are less useful in understanding how cooperatives and homeschooling parents negotiate literacy instruction. This information can, nevertheless, serve as useful background knowledge about how homeschoolers view cooperatives and their importance in the homeschooling movement. The publication of

of homeschooling co-ops and the many decisions that homeschooling parents must make, particularly if they are involved in forming a co-op rather than simply joining an already-existing co-op.

Homeschool co-ops can be outgrowths of homeschooling support groups or can be independent of affiliations to other groups. Here, I discuss homeschool support groups in greater depth both because they are an important facet of the homeschooling movement that provides information and support to homeschooling parents but also because they often provide classes, either through the support group or with an affiliated co-op. Many types of homeschool support groups exist throughout the United States and can range in size from a few families to a few hundred families. Their overall goal is to offer support and help to homeschooling families, but they often offer classes as well that are not necessarily structured as “co-ops” but, instead, occur within the support group framework.<sup>84</sup> In this chapter, I offer North Carolina as a case study of support groups and co-ops to generally offer an examination of their availability and to specifically discuss different types of co-ops and literacy classes available to homeschoolers.<sup>85</sup> In the case of

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these books and the friendly, helpful tones taken in them reveal a desire from these homeschooler authors to encourage others to take advantage of the opportunities, both academic and non-academic, that co-ops can offer.

<sup>84</sup> For example, the Administering Children’s Education (ACE) group in North Carolina has “Discovery Days” that offer classes to homeschooled students.

<sup>85</sup> I use North Carolina as a case study for several reasons. First, its homeschool laws are neither very strict nor very lax; homeschoolers must declare their intention to homeschool to the NC Division of Non-Public Education (NCDNPE), hold school for nine months, keep attendance records, and have students tested once per year in the areas of English grammar, reading, spelling, and mathematics (Home School Legal Defense Association “North Carolina” 1). Second, NC contains both highly populated urban areas (such as Charlotte and Raleigh) and less populated rural areas (such as the mountains in western NC), illustrating the groups available to homeschoolers in different types of areas. Third,

North Carolina, there are a total of 53,347 homeschools with an estimated 87,978 students in attendance (North Carolina Department of Administration, *2013 North Carolina*).<sup>86</sup> These fluctuate from only 23 homeschools in Tyrell County, on the eastern shore, to 4,913 in Wake County, which includes the state capital of Raleigh (North Carolina Department of Administration, *2013 North Carolina*, 2). There are 254 homeschool support groups listed on the North Carolinians for Home Education website (a key compilation of information about homeschooling in the state usually known as NCHE).<sup>87</sup> These are divided by region, which vary widely in number from thirty-four in the Charlotte region (a region of six counties) to eleven in less populated regions in the mountains (a region of eight counties). Fourteen of these are online-only groups that provide support to people across the state with specific needs, such as GIFTS NC to support homeschooling parents of special needs children and Single Homeschooling Parents of North Carolina (SHPSNC), providing encouragement to more specialized

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statistics about North Carolina homeschoolers are available through the NCDNPE that are not available for all states because not all states retain records of their homeschooling populations. This information can be helpful in contextualizing the North Carolina homeschooling population and its relationship to participation in cooperatives. Accordingly, while NC should not be viewed as *representative* of all states, it can be seen as *illustrative* of the United States homeschool population to some extent.

<sup>86</sup> Because students sometimes do not switch from a school setting to homeschooling (particularly young students just starting school) but North Carolinians must register in order to homeschool, the number of students is estimated since some parents could fail to report that they have children who are being homeschooled, especially when their children are young, while the number of homeschools is recorded.

<sup>87</sup> It is important to note that this does not denote all homeschool groups in North Carolina; instead, it is the most comprehensive and accurate list of homeschool groups. Forming a homeschool group does not obligate the group to report to NCHE or to list their group there. Therefore, these numbers should be taken as representative of the groups available and a likely underestimation of the numbers of groups in North Carolina. It should also be noted that homeschool groups sometimes start up and die quickly, so these numbers are accurate only at the time gathered (July 2012).

populations that may not be able to gather physically because of geographical limitations. It should be clear that not all homeschooling parents would join all (or perhaps any) homeschool groups available to them, even though they are a valuable resource.

As Robert Kunzman, Milton Gaither, and Mitchell L. Stevens point out and as the opening to this chapter indicates, there is also a sharp division between Christian or religious groups, which number 133 in North Carolina and include Toe River Christian Homeschoolers (TRCH) and Catholic Association of Family Educators (CAFÉ), and secular or non-religious groups, which number 40 in North Carolina and include Learning in Family Education (LIFE) and Carolina Superschoolers. These numbers seem to indicate that there are three times as many religious homeschoolers in NC as secular homeschoolers; however, in 2012-2013, 36.6% of NC homeschoolers identified themselves as “independent” while 63.4% identified themselves as “religious” (North Carolina Department of Administration, *2013 North Carolina*, 2). Because, as Stevens discusses, non-religious homeschoolers do not organize as often as religious homeschoolers, they are typically underrepresented in tallies of support groups and co-ops.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, there are specialized groups that do not identify as either religious or secular, which number twenty-four in North Carolina, such as CHANGE, a group in

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<sup>88</sup> In Mitchell’s study, secular homeschoolers were less likely to embrace structure; in an attempt to support any homeschooler’s teaching, they fail to provide any organization, which is necessary to a support group. For example, Nichole, a homeschooling mother who is part of two support groups, said that she suggested a contract with an arts group for group tickets through the support group Home Oriented Unschooling Experience, but that some people “don’t want to have any structure, *any* structure at all” (Mitchell 153). One homeschooling father in the group did not even want to determine what would be talked about at meetings because he wanted the group to be open. This open structure allows for many people to be involved and to feel included in the group, but it does not provide as much support for homeschooling parents.

Caldwell County for homeschoolers of special needs children. As is evident, these groups do reach a large number of homeschooling families, although families are not required to be a part of a support group.<sup>89</sup>

When support groups such as these offer classes, they do so within a framework that also provides information about homeschooling, socialization and activities, and discussion to homeschooling parents and children. Therefore, their focus is on these classes as part of their overall mission rather than on classes as a separate venture with different goals and objectives. The classes offered within support groups often mirror the interests of that support group. Literacy learning that occurs in a class sponsored by a Christian support group will usually look much different from learning in a class sponsored by a secular or special interests support group. In the following discussion, I have attempted to accurately describe the context within which classes involving literacies are offered, including the support group or co-op's overall mission and goals, so that the context within which they provide courses is clear.

In addition to classes offered as part of homeschool support groups are homeschool co-ops not tied to a particular support group and open to everyone regardless of their membership in a particular support group (unlike classes offered by support groups in which homeschooling families must often be members to be able to take the

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<sup>89</sup> The homeschool support groups examined here reach anywhere from just a few families to two hundred or more families. Clearly, not all homeschooling families in North Carolina are part of a support group as dividing the number of families by the number of support groups reported on NCHE (which is, as mentioned, an underestimation) would result in each group having roughly 177 families. Although some have more than this, many of these have fewer than twenty families.

classes). In North Carolina, sixteen co-ops are listed on the NCHE website<sup>90</sup> and, because this list is mostly confined to support groups, more are available. As will become evident in this chapter, these co-ops vary in structure, size, administration, teaching, and student bodies. The one thing that ties these very different spaces together is their relationship to homeschooling. Co-op classes, like classes support groups offer, are supplementary rather than replacements for parent-guided instruction. In North Carolina, a state with moderate homeschooling regulations,<sup>91</sup> the North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education (NCDNPE) precisely defines how cooperative education must be used:

It is a violation of G.S. 115C-563(a) for a student to receive academic instruction from someone outside of the household. Academic instruction subjects would traditionally include the core curriculum subjects of language arts, math, science and social studies. . . . Once the parent/guardian each year has provided the initial foundational instruction in the core academic subjects, he/she may then arrange with any other person he/she wishes to provide supplemental learning activities in any or all academic subjects desired.<sup>92</sup> (*Home School Guidebook* 8)

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<sup>90</sup> This number only includes groups exclusively devoted to offering classes. An additional twenty support groups also advertise some kind of academic enrichment in the form of classes, although this is not their main agenda.

<sup>91</sup> In defining North Carolina homeschool regulations as “moderate,” I follow the Home School Legal Defense Associations definitions of state homeschool laws as “no notice” to the state (seen in Texas, New Jersey, and eight other states), “low regulation” (states only require notification as seen in California, Alabama, and twelve other states), “moderate regulation” (states require notification, test scores, and/or external evaluation of student work as seen in North Carolina and twenty other states), and “high regulation” (states require notification, test scores, and/or external evaluation as well as additional requirements such as curriculum approval or parental teacher qualifications seen in New York, North Dakota, and four other states) (“State Laws”).

<sup>92</sup> These supplemental learning activities may include any of the following: “supplemental instruction; enrichment instruction; remediation instruction; teaching elective courses (foreign language, music, drama, art, computer, etc.); consultant services; guidance concerning the choosing of curriculum, textbooks and standardized testing; acquiring curriculum, textbook and standardized test materials; administering and scoring of the student’s annual nationally standardized achievement test; meeting periodically with the teaching parent/guardian to instruct him/her on how to best present

This means that the classes offered in support groups and co-ops may supplement the instruction offered at home, but core subjects must still rely on the parent(s) as the primary instructor(s). Writing, English, and speech courses, which I focus on in this chapter, offered either in support groups or co-ops cannot replace instruction at home. One way co-ops comply with this regulation is by only meeting one or two times per week to ensure that most instruction, even if built around the classes taken and curricula used at the cooperatives, is provided by parents. An interesting aspect of this regulation is that it reinforces the control that homeschooling parents have over their children's literacy learning. Although support group and co-op classes can augment the literacies being learned, they are not the primary ways that students can engage in literacy instruction. As I mention earlier in this chapter, however, bringing other people into literacy instruction complicates the control over literacy learning that homeschooling parents hold. Even courses that meet infrequently but regularly can greatly impact what parents teach their children at home when out of these classes.

In the discussion that follows, I analyze the writing, reading, and speech offerings of various co-ops, focusing on the options available to supplement homeschooling parents' literacy instruction and how these approach literacies, influencing how parents and children approach literacy instruction in the home. The private and public interests that are mediated through co-ops vary based on the size of the co-op, its religious orientation (a personal concern that can become public), and its degree of academic focus

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the forthcoming academic subject material to the student; assist the parent with the grading of homework; and answer any educational questions the teaching parent/guardian may have" (*Home School Guidebook* 8-9).

(a public concern), with the latter two more important factors than the first. The control over what literacies are learned and why, particularly in relation to personal values and beliefs and approaches to academics, must constantly be negotiated by homeschooling parents who place their children in co-op classes. The control they maintain over writing curricula is not as easily maintained when their children learn in spaces that are outside of the home, even though the majority of instruction still occurs in the home. As parents face a myriad of choices about co-ops, they must determine which best fit their needs, often prioritizing personal or public interests but never completely overlooking either. I argue that this analysis of co-ops and the literacy classes they offer reveals overlapping and complex concerns between home and school literacies as co-ops collectively attempt to navigate what literacies matter and why. These are tensions that occur any time schools and home literacies overlap, which, as I argue in this project, happens often. This examination also reveals various, often obscured, interests non-specialist writing instructors must navigate as they and their students confront competing visions of literacy instruction within which they must teach and learn.

### **Literacy Instruction in Cooperatives**

My analysis in this chapter focuses on four co-ops, broken into two different categories: informal literacy instruction and academic literacy instruction. The former category is more concerned with private interests and community building whereas the latter category is more concerned with the public mission of preparing students for college writing experiences. Table 1 outlines the co-ops I examine in this chapter, their



approach to instruction (informal or academic), their religious orientation, and whether they are joined to a support group.

*Table 1. Four Homeschool Cooperatives and Their Characteristics*

	Informal	Academic	Religious	Linked to a Support Group
Legacy	X		X	X
Chapel Hill Homeschoolers	X			X
Matthews Area Secular Co-op		X		
Colonial Homeschoolers		X	X	X

As I discuss these co-ops, it is important to remember that co-ops are formed by parents and that they represent the collective values of these parents, especially when they are first formed. As co-ops grow, they often become less directed by the entire group and are administered by one or a group of representative parents who may or may not be elected to these positions. The politics of these groups, therefore, can differ greatly; in some groups, individual parents may have a great deal of input into the classes offered and the content and ideals conveyed in these whereas in others they may have very little input and simply serve as consumers of the classes being offered. In other words, parents in some co-ops form and enact approaches to, attitudes toward, and valuing of various literacies, but in others they do not have this role. Clearly, homeschooling parents have very different experiences with navigating literacies when they enroll their children in co-ops, even within the same co-op since some parents may take on leadership roles and others may not. The closer parents are to the “inner circle” governing a co-op – whether

that includes all parents or a select few – the more influence they have over the literacies their children and other parents’ children learn. In all cases, however, parents rarely can enforce their particular vision of literacy instruction, even if in the “inner circle,” because they must account for many needs and perspectives from other parents. All parents who join co-ops must negotiate literacies with others, although how they do so and to what degree depends on the co-op and parents’ roles within it.

### *Informal Literacy Instruction*

Some co-ops focus on the development of children without necessarily thinking about preparing them for life after high school, including college. The most informal homeschool co-ops are often offered as components of support groups or to supplement people’s involvement in other support groups. I here focus on two different co-ops that are alternatively part of a support group and standalone. In doing so, I provide different perspectives on the ways that learning is seen by homeschoolers participating in these co-ops as informal and personal rather than academic and public. Literacy learning in these co-ops barely resembles any traditional school offerings in reading, writing, literature, and speech. Instead, the parents involved in these groups focus on collaborative learning as interactive and social, something to augment the potentially isolating effects of homeschooling rather than to supplement academic work taking place in the home. Such groups also tend to be religious in scope, with their emphasis on religion impacting the

classes they offer and the ways they view literacies.<sup>93</sup> Homeschooling parents who participate in these groups face less conflict about what literacies are valued because they primarily remain in control over how these are represented in school. In other words, it is not as difficult for parents to account for the literacy instruction offered in such co-ops unless they disagree with the personal values and beliefs the co-op proliferates. Although students still understand home and school literacies in certain ways, perhaps privileging home literacies, parents can maintain control over their children's literacy instruction at home without having to account for what children learn in classes at these co-ops unless they want to.

The Legacy Co-op in Raleigh, North Carolina represents this category of co-ops well. It is a co-op that is part of the Generations homeschool group, a group who grew from just four families in 1999 to over eighty families today. Although the support group and co-op are not small (according to Houk's heuristic, it would be considered large), the co-op offers informal, non-academic classes. As a professed Christian group whose name comes from their "desire to have an impact on the next generation and beyond" (Home page), the Generations group started the Legacy cooperative in 2001 as part of its overall mission. The name Legacy was chosen to indicate the parents' "hope that we will leave a legacy for our children" (Home page). Like some other religious support groups, this

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<sup>93</sup> Because non-religious support groups and co-ops have no assumed commonalities, academics often serve to pull these groups together. Therefore, classes offered by non-religious groups often have an academic bias that religious groups sometimes do not have. This is not to say that religious groups are never academic (as will be seen later, they often are). Instead, it is to point out that religious groups, instead of secular groups, are more likely to approach co-op classes for different reasons besides the academic, therefore resulting in many informal classes that are simultaneously non-academic and religious.

group not only professes its religious beliefs but is closely tied to a church, Crossroads Fellowship Church. Therefore, the classes they offer are deeply intertwined with their religious objectives, as seen in Generations' mission statement:

Generations is a ministry of Crossroads Fellowship that exists in partnership with the local church to encourage and equip Christian families as they educate their children at home. We accomplish this by offering academic enrichment programs, coordinating group activities, and fostering collaboration among our members. (Home page)

Rather than having a strong academic bias, then, the Legacy Co-op offers courses that reflect this religious mission, leaving academics up to parents and giving parents more control over the literacy instruction their children receive that will prepare them for their future lives. The Legacy Co-op supports the personal concerns of homeschooling parents without interfering greatly in the public concerns they may have about student preparation.

The Legacy Co-op schedule is *very* structured, occurring in two eight-week semesters each school year with meetings each week. Such a structure helps parents to buy into the co-op and sets expectations for participation that its informal nature does not necessarily fix. Part of the informality of the co-op revolves around the informal nature of the teaching and the goals of these courses: "Legacy is a co-op in which the children attend classes that are enriching, educational and fun that are taught by the members of the co-op. Each registered child will join two one-hour clsses [sic] each week" ("Legacy Co-op"). By presenting its classes as "enriching, educational and fun" ("Legacy Co-op"), the co-op reinforces these as informal and non-academic, focused on children's personal

development rather than preparing them for future work. They are classes that offer something educationally to students but that are meant to also enrich their lives (presumably through a Christian lens) and to show them how learning is fun. Control within this co-op is still in the hands of parents because they are the teachers of the classes; however, as I previously discussed, individual parents must give up some control over what their children learn in other parents' courses. This is not as problematic as in other co-ops where courses intrude more prominently into the instruction students learn at home. Placing education into the hands of parents also reinforces the informality of the co-op, whose class offerings are limited to the interests and specializations of the parents rather than augmenting or replacing parental instruction with hired instructors.<sup>94</sup> Thus, classes are offered in whatever topics parents feel comfortable teaching rather than according to the subjects the co-op and its members feel should be available to students. Community is also a key aspect of this cooperative, with each child being required to "join two one-hour classes [sic] each week." Such a requirement, common in homeschooling co-ops, ensures involvement and participation by co-op families while also illustrating the supplementary nature of co-ops in general. Two hours out of an entire school week clearly cannot replace instruction at home, even in one subject. In less formal co-ops such as Legacy, the informal nature of learning leaves even more schooling up to parents than in other, more academic co-ops.

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<sup>94</sup> As will be seen with Matthews Area Secular Co-op in the next section, co-op classes taught by parents are not always informal. However, when co-ops become more publicly-focused on academics, parents who teach are expected to have some experience or expertise in the subjects they teach, unlike in Legacy.

Legacy's provision of informal classes that allow room for parents' instruction to easily co-exist at home can be seen in the listing of previous courses offered to different ages of students. The website catalogs:

For Elementary ages: Human Body, American Girl, Dinosaurs, Lego Math, Filmmaking, Nutrition, Zoom Science, Origami, Paper Airplanes, and Chorus. For Middle School/High School ages: Mythbusters, Apologetics, Career Exploration, Forensic Science, Cake Decorating, Music 101, Book Club-Chronicles of Narnia series, Medieval Warfare and Knitting. ("Legacy Co-Op")

No specific information about curricula used or course descriptions are offered on the website, another sign that this is an informal co-op in which parents are expected to understand what the courses are about from the titles or to ask about them with a Legacy leader, reinforcing straightforward subject matter and communal ties. This list does illustrate how informal co-ops approach their supplementary role in schooling. First, roughly half of these classes focus on non-academic subjects (or subjects not traditionally considered academic) that are intended to be fun and enriching for students rather than replacements of academic subjects assumed to be learned at home and that will matter in college. These include "American Girl," "Paper Airplanes," "Cake Decorating," and "Knitting." While public schools (and many private schools) would likely consider these courses a waste of time, particularly given the testing-driven nature of elementary, middle, and secondary schooling today,<sup>95</sup> Legacy focuses on bringing homeschooled

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<sup>95</sup> Exceptions may be including classes such as "Cake Decorating" and "Knitting" into specific career tracks, such as those that Jonathan Kozol discusses in *The Shame of the Nation*. Common Core State Standards and the College and Career Readiness standards do not displace No Child Left Behind's focus on standardized testing, instead reinforcing

students together in order to learn about subjects that parents and students express interest in rather than only standard academic subjects, reinforcing the importance of exploring interests that are not traditionally found in schools. Homeschooling parents typically agree with the need to allow children to pursue their interests, although some parents may find this a waste of time in a co-op when children could, instead, be learning more complex material that is less easy to learn at home.

Second, such class offerings indicate that Legacy, unlike more formal co-ops, is not necessarily intended to help homeschooling parents prepare their students for postsecondary education. For example, while other co-ops offer college preparation courses (see MASC and HARC in the next section), Legacy offers a “Career Exploration” course that does not necessarily focus on postsecondary education. Given the informal tone of the classes offered at Legacy, this choice matches the cooperative’s attention to things students (and parents) are interested in rather than the academics emphasized by others (such as the U.S. Department of Education).<sup>96</sup> Parents could either use these courses to emphasize to their children the importance of following their own interests, possibly pushing them toward a more inclusive view of life after high school, or they could simply use them as time for socialization and enjoyment. Either way, unless parents were extremely concerned with academic instruction and could not support the

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Race to the Top’s emphasis on testing as a measure of students’ and schools’ achievements.

<sup>96</sup> I do not here advocate that such learning is better than or worse than the academic focus found in public schools, private schools, and other homeschool co-ops. Such judgments depend on the goals of individual parents and students. Instead, I point out this difference to illustrate the ways that Legacy’s goals impact the literacy instruction the co-op offers.

informality of these classes with their children, Legacy likely would not interfere with their approaches to literacy instruction at home since its classes largely do not offer stringent teaching.

Finally, there is only one listed class that specifically relates to reading – “Book Club–Chronicles of Narnia” – and one that relates to argumentation – “Apologetics.” Both of these speak to the religious nature of Legacy’s class offerings and the informality of the literacy learning offered through this co-op. Interestingly, both are also for middle and high school students, revealing parents’ acknowledgement that literacy learning is an important part of preparing older students for life after high school, which the informality of the classes partially contradicts. The class about the *Chronicles of Narnia*, a popular set of children’s books by C.S. Lewis presented as an adventure story that is an allegory for Christianity, is presented not as an in-depth study of literature, reading, or writing but instead as a discussion of the books as they are read at home by students in this class. Therefore, it provides a forum in which students can become used to speaking with others about texts but perhaps not in as critical and deep ways as students in public schools, private schools, or other homeschool co-ops are asked to discuss other texts. Students are also being asked to read about a religion that they and their parents likely already believe in, reinforcing these beliefs rather than challenging them. As a result, this course enhances students’ literacy learning by asking them to read and participate in discussion, but it may not require the same questioning of the text that classes in other co-ops or public and private schools might. Such a course makes gestures toward preparing students for learning outside of the home but it does so by relying on texts that reinforce



the religious beliefs that the Generations support group and Legacy co-op professes.

Doing so overlaps private and public concerns, but in a way that still privileges personal beliefs over students' preparation for life after high school.

The second class, "Apologetics," similarly blurs literacies typically found at home and in school but perhaps in a more confusing way. Apologetics generally involves the use of logic and rhetorical strategies to convince others of specific religious beliefs, which mirrors argumentative techniques. However, apologetics cares much more about supporting specific beliefs than arriving at a consensus about a public issue or a way to negotiate ideas with others as rhetoric and composition scholars often conceive argumentation in the writing classroom.<sup>97</sup> Usually described as a way to argue intellectually about the validity of Christianity, the study of apologetics asks students to learn about intellectual arguments for their beliefs that they can use in order to convince skeptics that their beliefs are valid (and correct). In the previous chapter, I explain how Bogart, the author of the *Brave Writer* curriculum, explicitly discusses the differences between apologetics and the types of argumentation students will be expected to write in college. Although apologetics courses can vary, all focus on specific religious beliefs and how to defend them. Generally, apologetics courses may teach students argumentation techniques but they do so through a specific lens focused on personal belief systems. This course, therefore, offers students some experience that could be more publicly useful, but it does so by focusing on specific beliefs rather than providing more general instruction in

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<sup>97</sup> Kenneth Burke's theories of "identification" and "consubstantiality" represent one of the ways rhetoric and composition scholars think about the conditions necessary for rhetorical intervention through argumentation (see *A Rhetoric of Motives*).

argumentation or writing. How translatable these skills are to post-high school writing environments, including college writing courses, is open to question.<sup>98</sup>

In order for parents to utilize the literacy instruction offered at Legacy, they must endorse the informal and religious attitude toward learning in general that this co-op conveys to students. While this attitude may be a problem for parents who want their children to have an academic orientation towards literacy learning, it gives parents more freedom to determine what their children's public literacies will look like and how to reinforce the valuing of these literacies at home. Such freedom is not as easily available when co-ops take control of the public literacy learning of homeschooled students. Therefore, parents have more control over their children's literacies when participating in an informal co-op such as Legacy because they can either reinforce this casual attitude at home or provide primary literacy instruction in more academic ways that position students to achieve particular goals after high school, such as attending college.

The second informal co-op, offered through the support group Chapel Hill Homeschoolers based out of Chapel Hill, NC (a town of about 60,000 residents thirty minutes west of Raleigh), mostly provides informal instruction to homeschooled students as Legacy does. Unlike Legacy, Chapel Hill Homeschoolers is open to all homeschoolers regardless of their religious beliefs, their group describing themselves as "non-sectarian and non-discriminatory" ("About Us"). The mission of the group includes a statement of

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<sup>98</sup> Phillip P. Marzluf argues that homeschooled students *writ large* have a difficult time transitioning to college writing classrooms that ask for openness and dialogue with other points of view, and Bogart argues that apologetics will not help students once they leave high school. Both assume that students will matriculate to schools where religious beliefs are not valued in academic discourse, which is not true for everyone.

purpose: “Chapel Hill Homeschoolers has been formed to serve as an organization of home school families committed to maintaining educational freedom and encouraging educational excellence” (“About Us”). Therefore, the classes this support group offers are provided within the context of parental rights to choose their children’s education.<sup>99</sup>

Although this mission statement indicates that the group wants to help parents with “educational excellence,” the class offerings do not mirror the academic focus that might be expected. Instead, the classes offered through the “Friday Enrichment” program are, like Legacy’s, supplemental, leaving room for parents to determine how to teach their children at home since they do not have to account for the instruction in the group. Such space for parents to structure teaching indicates that the group prioritizes “educational freedom” for parents while also seeking to provide opportunities for families “to meet and know other local homeschool families, while learning and playing together” (“Friday Enrichment”). In describing Friday Enrichment, the group claims, “Classes range from fairly academic to completely whimsical, with a wide and ever-changing range of options in between” (“Friday Enrichment”). The courses offered are at most “fairly” academic and most are built around activities that teachers and children can do together. Informal co-ops that are not religiously affiliated are not as common as religiously-affiliated informal co-ops because most co-ops without the commonality of religious beliefs are formed to help parents prepare their children for academic goals. Chapel Hill Homeschoolers reveals how even non-religious homeschoolers are not always focused on

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<sup>99</sup> This is, of course, the context that all homeschooling groups operate within. Here, however, it is especially emphasized over, for example, religious beliefs or specific pedagogical methods.

academics but, instead, sometimes seek classes that will allow them the maximum amount of control over their students' learning at home. As this group says, their classes are meant "to be a supplement to what a child is learning at home" rather than to govern what children learn both in the classes and at home ("Friday Enrichment").

Chapel Hill Homeschoolers does not have a set attendance policy, reinforcing their focus on flexibility for parents. It also asks for a shorter time commitment from parents and children, with two semesters of six weeks each year and one meeting per week with two class periods per meeting.<sup>100</sup> Unlike Legacy, Chapel Hill Homeschoolers do not set expectations about whether students must attend both periods during the semester, leaving parents to determine what classes they want their children to take and to only enroll their children in one class if they wish. Structuring the co-op in this way allows parents greater freedom to supplement their own teaching as they wish. Parents can submit proposals for classes that they would like to teach, but ultimately they have to give up control over what classes are taught, particularly because non-member professionals who are not homeschooling parents teach some classes. Since most of the classes are informal as at Legacy, if classes are unpopular (few parents register children for them), these classes are typically not offered again. Chapel Hill Homeschoolers mentions that "poetry, creative writing, and foreign languages" have been less popular ("Friday Enrichment"). Strangely, these are all classes focused on language use – whether English or another language – perhaps seeming neither academic nor whimsical enough

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<sup>100</sup> There are two different semesters each Fall and Spring: one for children up to nine years old and one for children over 9 years old. The Friday Enrichment program, thus, runs for twelve weeks each semester but only offers classes for certain age groups in six week blocks.

to catch parents or students' interest. Because of the informal nature of Chapel Hill Homeschoolers' classes, it is relatively easy for homeschooling parents to provide instruction at home that does not contradict instruction in this co-op but that also prepares students for their future lives in ways that this co-op does not attempt.

Chapel Hill Homeschoolers Friday Enrichment classes are very similar to Legacy's classes. In the first period for Fall 2013, older students could take in the first period a variety of courses (fourteen in total are offered), including "Science Movie Project," "Introduction to Web Development," "Taste of Shakes," and "Empathetic Global Citizens" ("Fall 2013 Nine & Older"). In the second period, older students could choose between fourteen classes, such as "Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'," "Comparative Mythology," "Graphic Novels!," and "Medicines from the Earth" ("Fall 2013 Nine & Older"). Most of these classes, similar to Legacy's, focus on non-academic subjects or approach traditionally academic subjects informally. The tone taken in course descriptions is one meant to draw parents and students into the classes rather than to assure parents, as can be seen in the co-ops in the next section, that these classes will prepare students for work in college and beyond.

Just as at Legacy, the ways Chapel Hill Homeschoolers undertakes literacy instruction allows homeschooling parents much room for teaching their children reading and writing in the home in ways that do not interfere with this group experience. The four classes offered that emphasize reading and writing are geared toward getting students interested in certain texts and helping them enjoy reading and writing rather than preparing them for college reading and writing expectations. Two courses parallel the

*Chronicles of Narnia* class at Legacy. “Taste of Shakes” offered in the first period provides students “highly interactive on-your-feet discovery of scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, and *Macbeth*” (“Fall 2013 Nine & Older”). Rather than being identified as a close examination of these texts, this course description emphasizes the interactive nature of the learning that will take place in this course. The description also asks parents, “Do you have one of those kids who loves to talk? Then this is the class for your child!” (“Fall 2013 Nine & Older”), indicating the focus on language and expression rather than analysis or writing in the course. Additionally, the non-academic nature of the course is seen in the note “There will be no homework for this class” (“Fall 2013 Nine & Older”). Rather than a rigorous course in literature, this class is meant to help students relate to the texts and the language of the texts. This is a valuable goal, but it is not one often emphasized in traditional school environments that have to focus more on testing than on student enjoyment. It is also a goal that does not readily translate into meeting public literacy expectations, such as that students will be able to critically analyze texts and to construct their own arguments, that can be seen in the CCSS and the *Framework*.

The second course also examines Shakespeare’s work but only one play, *The Tempest*. Focusing on one text allows for closer attention to the text, and this course does incorporate some writing:

Using highly interactive techniques, students will be reading and discovering Shakespeare's *The Tempest* from the original text as published by the Folger Library. While this is not an [sic] acting/ performance class, it is also not a heads-down study class. There will be mandatory reading and creative journal

assignment homework for this class. This class will prepare students to see the Playmaker's performance of *The Tempest*. (“Fall 2013 Nine & Older).

The works asked of students in this class is not the formal, analytical writing often found in high school English classes but, instead, informal creative writing assignments that still emphasize students’ enjoyment of the text rather than academic learning. Additionally, the course is meant to inform students’ viewing of a performance of the play, linking reading with performance. Therefore, these classes are both informal as is the reading class at Legacy, intended to help homeschooled children find enjoyment in literature rather than to provide them with academic literacy skills that may be more useful as they transition to college English courses, whether literature or writing courses.

Two other courses at Chapel Hill Homeschoolers, while still informal, offer literacy instruction more closely resembling that found in traditional schools.

“Comparative Mythology” is a class that examines “modern stories from an ancient perspective” (“Fall 2013 Nine & Older”). In trying to obtain registration for the course, the teacher, a homeschooling father, includes descriptions of the course for both parents and children that emphasize different aspects of the course. Parents are told:

This class will introduce your students to the mythologies of several different cultures including Greek, Roman, Norse, Celtic, Christian, and Babylonian. We will explore the commonalities between them and see what they have in common with modern day stories. We will be looking at these from a scholarly perspective with respectful approach to potentially sensitive topics such as crucifixion/resurrection and virgin birth stories. (“Fall 2013 Nine & Older”)

This course is the most academic of the literacy courses offered, taking a comparative approach to ancient and modern narratives and emphasizing that they will take “a

scholarly perspective” of these (although what he means by this perspective is not clear). Despite the inclusive nature of Chapel Hill Homeschoolers, this description is careful to mention how “potentially sensitive topics” that could intersect with some parents’ beliefs will be respectfully approached. Therefore, the personal beliefs of parents are noted and respected as possible influences on instruction even as the group avoids promoting specific personal beliefs in its own classes. For students, the description is very relatable: “What do Harry Potter, Luke Skywalker, King Author, and Superman all have in common? How did ancient people think the world they live in came to be? How did they think it would end and why? We will explore these topics and more” (“Fall 2013 Nine & Older”). Students are appealed to through characters they are likely familiar with, although the connections between these and “ancient people” is unclear. “Comparative Mythology,” while still informal, provides more in-depth instruction into the reading of narratives than other courses in this co-op, although writing is never mentioned as a component of the course.

Finally, “Graphic Novels!” offers students an opportunity to learn about the production of text, although it is notable that this text is a combination of text and images typically found in popular culture rather than essay writing or another type of academic alphabetic text. It may be that instructors did not propose traditional writing courses or that parents do not enroll their children in these courses as part of this co-op since it is clear that in other co-ops, particularly academic co-ops, parents do enroll students in writing courses. Whatever the case, “Graphic Novels!” is the one course Chapel Hill



Homeschoolers offers in which students can produce their own writing, even though the course description emphasizes narratives and images much more than text:

This course will provide students with the basic know-how of how to create awesome comics/graphic novels. Students will learn about character design, story-structure, and how comics/graphic novels relate to other media. This course merges the disciplines of story-telling and visual art in order to help participants conceive and create their own narrative tales. All interested are encouraged to attend and no prerequisites are required other than a desire to tell stories in the form of pictures. (“Fall 2013 Nine & Older”)

Rather than just paying attention to making a graphic novel, this course also draws larger connections to narratives and media forms as students learn about graphic novels and create their own. Unlike the previous courses mentioned, a homeschooling parents does not teach this class. Instead, an MFA cartoon artist who teaches classes, produces his own work, and writes for *Au Courant*, an arts magazine produced out of Raleigh, NC, offers this class. His ethos as a professional cartoon artist, which is noted in the course description, adds to the appeal of this class to homeschooling parents who desire their children to experience instruction from a professional. As the one course closest to writing in Chapel Hill Homeschoolers Friday Enrichment, “Graphic Novels!” does not offer formal instruction in academic writing but is, instead, an opportunity for students to explore narratives through images and text. Like other classes at Chapel Hill Homeschoolers Friday Enrichment, this course leaves plenty of space for homeschooling parents to teach their children about reading and writing at home without interfering with or contradicting the instruction in this co-op.

In both Legacy and Chapel Hill Homeschoolers Friday Enrichment, literacy learning is seen as fun and enjoyable reading rather than as an academic subject worthy of intense study. Neither co-op offers a writing course, perhaps because parents who enroll their students in these co-ops desire more fun, supplemental courses that don't draw too much time away from their own academic instruction. This attitude is transmitted to students in these co-ops, even if individual homeschooling families take a different approach to literacy learning in the home.<sup>101</sup> Even the apologetics course at Legacy and the comparative mythology and graphic novels courses at Chapel Hill Homeschoolers courses, which could inculcate the critical thinking and argumentation techniques valued by rhetoric and composition scholars, are not offered for a long enough time period or in a structured enough environment to help students prepare for in-depth approaches to reading and writing. Therefore, the control these co-ops exert over homeschooled students' literacy learning mainly appears in the informal ways they approach reading and argumentation, and the lack of attention they give to writing instruction. Parents retain control over the ways their children approach writing instruction and the overlaps between private interests such as ethical beliefs and public concerns such as college preparation because these co-ops do not structure literacy learning enough to interact with parents' instruction in the home. Writing teachers, including postsecondary instructors, do not usually have the luxury of similarly controlling writing instruction; instead, they and their students must adapt to the ways of writing that the institution asks them to teach and participate in. Thus, homeschooling

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<sup>101</sup> For further discussion of some curricula-based approaches to literacy learning, see the previous chapter.

parents in co-ops that offer informal literacy instruction do not have to negotiate as many conflicts about literacy learning as others teachers in traditional schools and postsecondary institutions or even as homeschooling parents who participate in more structured co-ops that I discuss in the next section.

### *Academic Literacy Instruction*

The co-ops discussed in this section, as already mentioned, focus much more on academics than either Legacy or Chapel Hill Homeschoolers co-ops. This is particularly evident in the ways that literacy learning is treated as an academic subject instead of a fun and interesting subject that parents want their children to enjoy. Therefore, these co-ops have a more public mission of providing supplemental classes to homeschooling families that will help students prepare for academic expectations, particularly as they transition into college writing courses. When homeschooling parents choose to participate in these academic co-ops, they must give up control over their children's literacy instruction to a much greater degree than in informal co-ops based on their determination that doing so will help their children academically succeed in the future. In many ways, then, these co-ops help parents imagine the future writing their children will do and seek to prepare them for this instruction while asking parents to give them more control not just over what children learn in the co-op but also how parents approach writing instruction at home.

When academic co-ops are religious, they do not focus as much on primarily Christian points of view. There seems to be two reasons for this. First, focusing on

academics does not allow as much room for classes that would not be valued in traditional schools or postsecondary institutions because these co-ops value helping homeschooling parents provide children a rigorous educational experience. Second, this focus on academics brings with it an awareness of audience; these classes are seen much more as preparation for academic work in postsecondary institutions than are classes in Legacy and Chapel Hill Homeschoolers Friday Enrichment. Therefore, they should be classes that are valued outside of the homeschool co-op and outside of parents' ideological and religious values. This is not to say that the instruction is neither ideological nor religious. However, it is to point out that instruction is primarily undertaken to ensure that students learn concepts and ideas that will be useful to them outside of these specific ideological and religious contexts (i.e. postsecondary institutions). Homeschooling parents enrolling their children in academic co-ops such as the two I discuss here primarily value the college preparation they believe these co-ops will provide their children, even above their personal values and beliefs that can still influence the instruction offered.

Matthews Area Secular Co-op (MASC) is the first academic co-op I examine. It is distinctly non-religious, like Chapel Hill Homeschoolers, professing to be:

... open to homeschooled teens in the Charlotte/Matthews, NC area who are willing to uphold the values of the group, regardless of ethnicity, reason for homeschooling, and religious or political affiliations. This thriving community is established upon the values of respect, compassion, acceptance and tolerance toward others. (Home page)

Because so many religious homeschool groups exist, this group is careful to distinguish itself from them by telling interested parents that this group is not designed to support a particular religion, similar to Chapel Hill Homeschoolers' mission statement. MASC's academic focus can be found even in its mission: "An organization for support, educational opportunities, and social activities of academically-minded homeschool teens and their families" (Home page). Like Chapel Hill Homeschoolers, MASC's lack of religious motivation for the group is replaced with its desire to provide support and opportunities for a specific group, in this case "academically-minded homeschool teens and their families." Personal beliefs have been replaced, therefore, with educational goals as the glue that binds this group together. However, MASC does not just offer classes. It also organizes group activities such as ice skating and bowling for students to participate in. To explain why these activities are included in a co-op primarily focused on school-related subjects, MASC claims that physical activity is part of education, quoting John F. Kennedy as saying, "Physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body, it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity" ("Activities"). The inclusion of these activities indicates this co-op's recognition of the overlap between personal and public concerns; taking care of an individual's body is seen as integrally related to a person's education. MASC also does not allow students under age 12 to join the activities or classes, focusing on junior high/high school students, which allows it to develop classes most helpful to students preparing to move on to high school and postsecondary educational standards. This is also an age at which some homeschooling parents would become concerned with academics and their children's

preparation for future educational experiences, especially in college, so MASC answers their concerns. With the inclusion of social activities, MASC does not completely elide personal concerns but it does shift more attention to academic preparation than these activities.

Although MASC has a definite academic focus, it still only meets once a week, in keeping with North Carolina guidelines about the supplemental role classes outside the home can take in homeschools, and offers different classes each semester “depending on the needs of the group and the availability of teachers and their desires” (“Academics”). Despite this supplemental role, homeschooling parents who enroll their children in MASC courses would likely either have to use these classes as starting points for work at home on other days or renegotiate differences between this instruction and their instruction at home. It would be difficult to contradict the formal instruction in MASC with different instruction in the home because students could become confused about what they were learning and why. Students could also have difficulty integrating what they were learning in MASC and at home. Parents who determine to buy into MASC’s mission must, correspondingly, account for what their children learn in MASC classes as they structure their home literacy instruction or risk muddling their students’ learning.

MASC articulates its academic stance by describing the benefits children should receive from their classes, telling parents that participation will help children succeed in the future: “We concentrate on offering enrichment classes of exceptional quality. We feel that most of our time needs to be spent engaging in enrichment classes and activities that complement high school transcripts and enhance the college application”

(“Academics”). Although MASC still envisions its courses as enrichment classes (as the Legacy co-op particularly expressed as well), it clearly intends these classes to be academically supportive rather than augmenting in a recreational or religious sense (more personal goals). This is particularly evident in the co-op’s focus on “high school transcripts” and “the college application” as important places in which these classes should help students (“Academics”), specific locations that are not mentioned by either Legacy or Chapel Hill Homeschoolers. It may seem that Legacy and Chapel Hill Homeschoolers are not concerned at all with college and that MASC and Colonial Homeschoolers (who I discuss next) are entirely focused on college preparation. This tension can be partially explained by parents’ approaches to homeschooling that I discuss in greater depth in the first chapter; some parents turn to homeschooling to escape the structure of traditional schooling and to allow their children freedom to pursue their own interests and some turn to homeschooling as a quality educational option. The different perspectives found in co-ops and that homeschooling parents hold are not mutually exclusive. Instead, most homeschooling parents are concerned with both the personal and academic development of their children. The degree to which they are focused on these concerns, however, and therefore the degree to which co-ops attend to these, varies as can be seen in the offerings of these co-ops.

The academic nature of MASC is seen most clearly in its descriptions of previously-offered classes. Of the seven classes described, only two – “Art 101” and “Service Team” – do not relate to literacy and/or speech. Compared to the informal co-ops, this is a big shift away from interest-based classes like knitting to school-based

classes. “Gavel Club” and “Debate” are speech classes<sup>102</sup> and “Composition and Literature (High School),” “Introduction to Writing (Middle School),” and “Battle of the Books (Grades 6-8)” are related to literacy learning (“Academics”). Notably, MASC includes reading and writing classes for all age groups allowed within the co-op, unlike Legacy and Chapel Hill Homeschoolers. This points to their perceived valuation of literacy instruction for junior high and high school students and their desire to help parents provide instruction in reading and writing that is valued in traditional schools and postsecondary institutions. Therefore, these courses more closely resemble courses typically found in public and private schools and postsecondary institutions than Legacy or Chapel Hill Homeschoolers’ classes.

The two speech classes offered are actually an academic club, “Gavel Club,” and a “Debate” class. “Gavel Club” is less useful in this examination as it is a forum in which homeschooled students meet to give speeches, receive peer feedback on them, and learn how to run meetings. However, the emphasis on peer feedback allows presenters to receive responses to their work, which is a helpful aspect of this course that could prepare students to give speeches in postsecondary institutions and familiarize them with the process of peer workshops, which are frequently utilized in first-year writing courses.

“Introduction to Debate” is described as follows:

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<sup>102</sup> I include these speech classes because speech has historically been joined to rhetoric from Plato and Aristotle’s uses of speech to teach students how to debate in public forums to the simultaneous emphasis on speech and writing in rhetoric courses of the nineteenth century to first-year composition courses today that often rely on discussions of writing, and sometimes formal speeches, to help students learn to better articulate arguments and ideas. I recognize that orality is often separated from literacy (see Walter J. Ong and Eric A. Havelock), but more recent scholars such as Heath have drawn helpful connections between literacy and orality that illustrate their interrelated nature.



Have you ever wanted to bring someone around to your point of view or write a killer persuasive article? In Introduction to Debate: Constructing a Logical Argument, you learn what a logical argument is, how to construct one, and how to recognize and avoid logical fallacies, skills which can really come in handy not only in formal debate, but when dealing with parents, other authority figures, and friends. Since debating skills are also helpful for clarifying our own thinking, we will also explore how to argue an issue from both sides, sometimes requiring you to construct arguments which are against your emotional inclinations. No particular formal style of debate will be used in this introductory class, but we will practice what we have learned during friendly informal debates in class. (“Academics”)

Although the method of delivery for this course is speech (“friendly informal debates”), the course emphasizes that the skills learned in this course are useful both in speech and writing, pulling together orality and literacy as two similar argumentative situations. Rhetoric and composition scholars emphasize differences in rhetorical situations and ways to persuade someone based on these that this class does not, but this class does highlight key practices that first-year composition courses often try to emphasize, including how to construct “a logical argument,” “how to recognize and avoid logical fallacies,” and “how to argue an issue from both sides” (“Academics”). These emphasize crafting an argument that persuades others while also interrogating different sides of an argument, a more academic focus that would better prepare homeschooled students for first-year writing classes than the apologetics course offered at Legacy. Because of this more academic focus, parents with particular religious beliefs would have to allow for others in MASC, particularly the teacher of this course, to take control of some of their children’s literacy learning. Providing literacy instruction focused on argumentation through the use of these skills is very different from presenting these skills as ways to prove a particular religion is correct. As parents turn to this course as one way for

students to prepare for college, they have to either support the class's focus on argumentation in this way or intervene at home to provide alternative ideas to their children. Such alternative instruction could be complicated since parents would presumably value the skills their children gained in this class but not necessarily the beliefs about accounting for multiple perspectives or taking on different viewpoints displayed in it.

In addition to speech classes promoting argumentation as an engagement with multiple perspectives, the reading and writing courses at MASC similarly ask students to engage in learning that they tell parents will ultimately prepare their children for postsecondary reading and writing. Literacy instruction for grades 6-8 is more divided than for student in grades 9-12. Battle of the Books is actually a competition sponsored by the North Carolina School Library Media Association for any students in grades 6-8 in North Carolina, whether homeschooled students or traditionally-schooled students. MASC claims, "It is used to motivate middle school students to read books from a wide variety of genres. Students participate in a 'quiz-bowl' style tournament in late March that tests their knowledge of a list of books established by the NCSLMA's Battle of the Books committee" ("Academics"). This is not, therefore, a reading list created either by homeschooled parents or MASC but, instead, a list created by NCSLMA for any students at any school. To participate, students join a group of 5-10 MASC students who read "most, if not all" of the books on NCSLMA's list, meet twice a month, and participate in the tournament ("Academics"). Homeschooled students' experiences in Battle of the Books are intended to parallel other students' experiences and results in involvement in

the same competition as traditionally-schooled students. MASC's participation in this program indicates its promotion of NCSLMA's literacy sponsorship as well as its belief that participation can help students encounter texts that will help prepare them for future reading experiences.<sup>103</sup> By participating in this program, MASC forfeits much control of this reading instruction to NCSLMA, including what students read and how they prove their knowledge. Homeschooling parents who enroll their students in this class, therefore, not only surrender some control to MASC but also to NCSLMA. They must do so in the belief that this reading instruction will contribute to their children's preparation for future schooling, but homeschooling parents do not often hand over control of their children's education to public instruction without fears of total control. MASC serves an important role as a purveyor of NCSLMA's program that could alleviate some parents' worries about alliances with a public program. It also speaks, however, to the control some homeschooling parents are willing to give up if they believe that certain instruction will help their children academically succeed.

The writing course offered for grades 6-8 at MASC, "Introduction to Writing I," similarly asks parents to give up control over what their children learn about writing in the best interests of their preparation for future study. Because this course is based on a writing curriculum specifically developed for homeschoolers, the decision to enroll children in this course may be less vexed for parents since they are not asked to consent to instruction offered by a public entity as with the Battle of the Books class. However,

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<sup>103</sup> For 2013-2014, the list of twenty-six books includes *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith, and *Red Scarf Girl* by Ji-Li Jiang (NCSLMA).

the decision to use this specific curriculum could contradict some parents' ideas about writing instruction. As often occurs in academic co-ops, then, parents must determine if the proposed academic benefits their children will receive from the course are worth their giving up control over what their children learn about writing. This course uses WriteShop I, which I discuss in chapter two, and the class is described as:

This incremental, non-threatening writing program uses the WriteShop I . . . curriculum. WriteShop I enables students to successfully enhance their writing skills by learning to write and edit compositions from various genres. We will focus on mastering the fundamental building blocks of writing. Students learn to write concise and explicit descriptive, informative, and narrative essays as well as expository reports and creative stories. Each lesson includes a Skill Builder activity for students to practice new grammatical and stylistics skills that are incorporated in each lesson. A self editing and proofreading checklist is included with each lesson to help students focus on lesson requirements, skills learned, content, composition, and mechanics. We will generally spend 2 weeks on each lesson. Also included is a 5 to 6 week Journalism unit where the students work in groups to create and produce an historical newspaper. Prerequisites: Basic understanding of grammar and sentence structure. ("Academics")

The writing instruction offered in this class is intended to mirror writing done by students in schools; hence, students will learn "to write and edit compositions from various genres" including "descriptive, informative, and narrative essays as well as expository reports and creative stories" ("Academics"), genres that CCSS also calls on students to learn. These are genres that they will be expected to build upon if they take the "Introduction to Composition and Literature" class at MASC and that are anticipated to help students prepare themselves for high school and postsecondary writing. Structuring the class around WriteShop I also makes it difficult for parents to introduce a different writing curriculum at home, since doing so could be too much work for students and

could contradict the instruction found in this class. Paralleling the work that some public and private school students do on school newspapers, this class also offers a unit “where the students work in groups to create and produce an historical newspaper” (“Academics”) as a way to provide them with this opportunity. In both literacy classes intended for grade 6-8, MASC attempts to provide homeschooled students with literacy instruction that will prepare them for future reading and writing experiences, controlling this instruction by reinforcing the academic nature of literacies in classes. Homeschooling parents who enroll their children in these courses must surrender some control over their children’s literacy instruction to MASC and, sometimes, to public entities such as public libraries. Other parents, such as those that attend Legacy or Chapel Hill Homeschoolers co-ops, may be less comfortable with giving up so much control over their children’s education, particularly when it aligns so closely with the school instruction that many homeschooling parents seek to escape when they decide to homeschool. The academic nature of instruction is something that MASC, however, identifies as a strength of its co-op since it can help parents provide instruction that they may not be able to on their own.

Instruction for older students similarly asks parents to surrender control over their children’s literacy instruction in the name of providing them with an education that will help them succeed academically in the future. The “Introduction to Composition and Literature” course for grades 9-12 combines reading and writing with SAT test preparation. This course calls for much work to be done outside of the weekly meetings, enforcing greater control over and connection between what students do at home and in the co-op:

This class will provide a variety of different types of assignments, while at the same time allowing you to incorporate topics you may be studying at home, which is highly encouraged. There will be several opportunities to research and study current topics and recent developments. We will study eight units; beginning with four weeks of reviewing thoroughly the process of writing, the style and elements to create concrete imagery and precise language, the six traits of an effectively written piece, and sentence and paragraph development. In addition to learning how to write a research paper, students will learn how to successfully craft seven different forms of essays as well as how to write a short argumentative paper. Our fifth unit will focus on ACT / SAT preparation where students will learn the keys to writing top essays within the 25 and 30 minute time limits. Three to four novels will be analyzed for students understanding of the intricate literary techniques and purposes of authors. Most of the work for this class will be completed at home. Class time will be used for teaching new skills and techniques, discussions, and other in-class activities. All reading assignments will have to be completed at home. Additional quarterly projects are added for a well rounded English program. A vocabulary curriculum (such as Wordly Wise) should be added to complete your English program as well as a curriculum to review grammar if needed. Prerequisites: Intermediate Writing, or a good understanding of writing principles. Readiness to learn SAT/ ACT writing preparations. High School Credit: 1 English Credit. Texts: Writer's Inc., Elements of Style, The Synonym Finder by Rodale, The Blue Book of Grammar, and any literature books read during the year. ("Academics")

The class description explains in detail what will be studied, how long it will be studied for, how work must be completed (at home and in the co-op), learning goals, prerequisites, texts, and credit as well as supplementary texts to be used at home. It resembles descriptions of first-year composition courses in university and college catalogs, providing an example of the kind of language students can expect to see if they attend a postsecondary institution.

The ways this class controls the instruction parents provide at home is quite vexed. The description seeks to initially comfort parents that they can integrate the writing instruction provided in the class with "topics you may be studying at home." By doing so, the writing course would be treated very much as curricula in chapter two

sometimes approach writing: teaching writing by asking students to write about topics they are learning for other subjects. However, the rest of the description speaks much more to the control over instruction that parents will have to give up if their students take this class. Parents are told, “Most of the work for this class will be completed at home . . . All reading assignments will have to be completed at home.” Such instruction can still be seen as supplemental because most of the work is completed at home, but parents are no longer in control of what their students do in the home. Instead, they must assign homework for this class as their children’s literacy instruction at home throughout the week. The complete nature of the class is also indicated through the note, “A vocabulary curriculum (such as Wordly Wise) should be added to complete your English program as well as a curriculum to review grammar if needed,” which allocates work parents assign to a supplementary role. Parents who enroll their students in this course must be willing to allow their writing instruction to be subsumed by the co-op.

One important reason why parents would be willing to give up this control is their belief that the co-op course adequately prepares their children for future writing expectations, particularly in college. Like the writing class for grades 6-8, this class takes a genre approach to writing,<sup>104</sup> providing students with experience writing in “seven different forms of essays” as well as a research paper and a short argumentative paper.

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<sup>104</sup> It could be argued that these courses for junior high and high school take a “modes” approach to writing rather than a genre approach. Both focus on different kinds of writing with genre approaches being more mindful of explicitly discussing genres as genres that require particular techniques in relation to certain audiences, purposes, contexts, etc. than the modes approach, which simply asks students to write different kinds of essays. This class may, therefore, be more accurately described as a modes approach; I continue to use “genre,” however, to maintain consistency with MASC’s understanding of these courses.

Although these aren't specifically identified (except for the argumentative essay), the assumption is that these are types of essays that students will need to learn in order to be successful in college. Specifically mentioning the argumentative essay projects a future in which students engage in argumentative writing, presumably in postsecondary classes since MASC's mission mentions academic preparation as a goal for the co-op's courses. The pedagogy enacted resembles some first-year composition pedagogy, with class time being "used for teaching new skills and techniques, discussions, and other in-class activities" ("Academics"), making the most of time students have with the instructor and each other to learn. Such instruction would likely be unavailable in the home since some parents may not know what to teach their students and since similarly-aged students aren't available to interact with in a group. Therefore, not only does this class use these activities to enhance students' learning but it also prepares homeschooled students to enter future classrooms in which they will have to participate in these types of activities. Parents willing to surrender control over their children's writing instruction consent to MASC's projections of future writing instruction, trusting that these are correct and that the instruction offered in this class will adequately prepare their children for the future.

The Legacy and Chapel Hill Homeschoolers Friday Enrichment co-ops offer their parents more control over the literacy learning offered in their co-ops by aligning these classes with parents' religious beliefs and educational goals, but this control may cost their students the opportunities that would best prepare them for writing in college. Parents seeking to prepare their students academically would be more likely to turn to a co-op such as MASC that is concerned with the academic preparation of students than to



informal co-ops such as Legacy and Chapel Hill Homeschoolers. Homeschooling parents who want more guidance about how to prepare their children for postsecondary reading and writing experiences rely on MASC to determine what these experiences will look like and how instruction can prepare their children for them. Parents surrender control over what happens both in the co-op classes and at home so that their children can participate in what they presume are valuable learning opportunities.

The second, and final, co-op I examine in this chapter is actually composed of three different groups administered by the Colonial Homeschoolers group in Cary, NC, a western suburb of Raleigh with approximately 141,000 residents: the Potter's Clay of Cary (PCC), Speak-Out NC, and Homeschool Academic Resource Center (HARC). PCC is a co-op for elementary and middle school students, Speak-Out NC is a debate team for 12-18 year olds, and HARC is a co-op for high school students that offers classes that claim to prepare students for postsecondary instruction. Unlike MASC, HARC and PCC are religiously affiliated through Colonial Homeschoolers and identify as Christian groups that are open to everyone but that offer a Christian curriculum (Speak-Out NC is also religiously affiliated, but its sponsorship is more complicated as I later discuss). The interplay between personal beliefs and public concerns with academic preparation for college writing instruction, overlapping and shifting depending on which group parents enroll their children in, makes tensions between these the most vexed of instruction in any of the co-ops discussed in this chapter. Parents who choose to enroll their children in any of these groups must navigate how the group supports certain belief systems as well as how it projects the future academic work students will be asked to do. Thus, parents

face more complicated negotiations of the literacy instruction that their children receive in these groups, particularly if they do not hold the specific religious beliefs the group supports and, instead, are primarily interested in the academic nature of the offerings available to their children. Colonial Homeschoolers, the support group within which HARC, Speak-Out NC, and PCC are housed, is a Christian support group affiliated with a Baptist church that allows any homeschooler to join but that insists upon its leadership subscribing to common religious beliefs. Even if all parents are allowed to enroll their children in classes, the leaders of these groups enforce the beliefs that the groups are meant to support. In addition to these three co-ops, Colonial Homeschoolers offers a high school graduation ceremony, National Honors Society, field trips, and sports to its members. Therefore, it is the largest support group found in this chapter, which seeks to provide school opportunities to homeschoolers that are undergirded by specific religious beliefs and that parallel traditional school opportunities.

PCC, the co-op for younger students, offers three classes to students once a week (on the same day), prioritizing those families “who share our vision and want to participate in the entire co-op” (“Frequently Asked Questions”). They do so because they claim that they are striving “to create not just a co-op, but a family. A place where lasting friendships are fostered and nurtured in a loving, Christian environment where children can learn and thrive individually and together” (Home page). In order to do so, PCC – despite the decision by Colonial Homeschoolers that any homeschooler, regardless of beliefs, can join their group – prioritizes those families who share their beliefs. Religious beliefs, therefore, do not take the back seat that Colonial

Homeschoolers' policy about members may indicate; instead, parents joining the group in hopes of providing academic opportunities to their children but who do not share the beliefs the co-op proclaims may find that they are not welcomed as readily into PCC. Even though this is a larger co-op, PCC wants to create an atmosphere similar to smaller co-ops such as Legacy in which homeschooled students are brought together not only through academics but also through families' commitment to common belief systems. In addition to prioritizing those families who hold similar beliefs, then, they also emphasize the importance of families committing long-term to participation in the co-op rather than those who seek "a short-term or temporary classroom situation for their children" (Home page). Parents who decide to join PCC must, therefore, commit to this particular framework for home and school in which school is seen not just as academic opportunity but, perhaps more importantly, as a community of people committed to a particular type of education that intersects with a particular set of beliefs. The literacies valued in this space could be very different from those valued in individual families' homes and in postsecondary institutions, creating the potential for conflict between these spaces.

PCC supports three subjects that they offer in a sequenced order: writing/grammar, science, and history. In narrowing the co-op to these subjects and following a sequence, PCC reinforces its focus on academics and its dedication to long-term commitments from parents who can best take advantage of the co-op by sending their children to these classes over time.<sup>105</sup> Although these are core subjects, PCC is careful to assert that the classes are "a support to your individual homeschool not a

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<sup>105</sup> Strangely, PCC does not identify mathematics as a key subject to provide instruction in, even though this is a subject that many homeschoolers often struggle to teach.

replacement” (“Frequently Asked Questions”) due to the homeschool laws in place in North Carolina. However, because of the integration of beliefs and academics, parents who choose to enroll their children in these classes must necessarily account for how this instruction will shape what they teach in the home. Parents could either support this instruction or, if they held different beliefs, they could attempt to counter some of the instruction so that their children understood other ways of thinking about reading and writing. The latter could be difficult to do, however, if parents actually committed to long-term involvement in the co-op, which would continue to reinforce to their children particular ways that beliefs and literacy instruction intersect.

When families sign up for PCC, each family must commit to one parent serving as a “facilitator” (or teacher) for one class for which two facilitators are assigned. Essentially, this results in parents teaching courses rather than, as in other larger co-ops such as HARC, hired teachers teaching courses. Even though facilitator teams are required to turn in lesson plans by July to a “level coordinator,” this means that non-specialist teachers are in charge of teaching all classes at PCC. This may not be an issue if parents actually have experience with the subject they teach. But if they are uncomfortable teaching a group of children or must volunteer for a course even if they aren’t comfortable with the subject, such instruction could be a problem. PCC values parents as parents first rather than as teachers, which means parents may or may not have expertise in the subjects they teach. Therefore, sponsors who are qualified, semi-qualified, or unqualified to teach reading and writing depending on the facilitators assigned to a course may control the literacies learned in PCC’s courses. For parents who

are looking for a co-op that provides academic preparation for their students, PCC does not offer trained or experienced teachers who understand what to teach in order to prepare students for future academic instruction. Such non-specialist instructors can offer useful instruction, but it will be not as informed about what future reading and writing skills children actually need to know in order to succeed. The vision of future academics thus remains blurred.

At PCC, the writing curriculum is based on the Institute for Excellence in Writing (IEW) curriculum, which offers enough structure that non-specialist instructors could learn from the curriculum how to teach writing.<sup>106</sup> This provides them with a framework for the class, although it still would not address their potential lack of knowledge about postsecondary writing expectations. IEW, then, would be making these projections for both teachers in PCC's writing classes and students who take these. Overall the writing classes offered at PCC take a genre approach to writing<sup>107</sup> that introduces students "to a variety of writing models" while simultaneously focusing on "tools" to use in writing ("2012-2013 Classes"). Depending on the facilitators of the class and their familiarity with writing, such a curriculum could either be a dynamic way of learning to write or a formulaic approach to writing.<sup>108</sup> PCC emphasizes the importance of placing students according to skill level rather than grade level; however, the three courses offered roughly correspond to 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grades, 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grades, and 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades and outline "prerequisites" such as "academically strong 1<sup>st</sup> grader" for the first course and "6th

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<sup>106</sup> For further discussion of this curriculum, see the previous chapter.

<sup>107</sup> See previous note about the use of "genre" instead of "modes."

<sup>108</sup> This could be true of any instructor, whether a teacher in a public or private school, homeschool, or postsecondary institution.

grade students new to IEW; 4th grade students with IEW experience could be considered but would need to be approved by the facilitators” for the second course (“2012-2013 Classes”). In doing so, facilitators exert control over the evaluation of students’ abilities that is not normally found in homeschooled classes that occur in the home, at least in such institutionalized ways. This removes parents’ control over the placement of their children into curricular levels. The structure of IEW would also make assigning different material at home very difficult, further wresting control of writing instruction away from parents who enroll their children in PCC’s writing classes.

Such wresting away of control can further be seen in the course description for the third writing class:

Our goal for this class is to utilize IEW resources, to set the foundation for high school level writing. We will pick up where Level 2 leaves off by reviewing the units at a quicker pace and with more attention to using all of the stylistic techniques. We will accomplish this over a two year rotating program, with the first year covering strategic IEW units and in the second year really honing in on report, essay, prompt, and critique writing. (“2012-2013 Classes”)

Despite the fact that parents of students at PCC are expected to maintain control over the literacies their children learn as homeschoolers, this course description reveals that the PCC curriculum involves an extended commitment (as already discussed) of two years and that this sequencing would best be served through support of these literacies at home. It also paves the way for students to enter HARC, a co-op I shortly discuss, in its claim that the class will “set the foundation for high school level writing.” Presumably these high school writing expectations are those found in HARC since parents ostensibly would funnel their children into that co-op once they were in high school. Therefore, the control

parents have over their children's literacies is diffused by PCC facilitators and the IEW curriculum. Parents must support this curriculum at home or risk confusing their children about how to learn and use specific writing skills.<sup>109</sup> As with MASC, parents choose to participate despite this loss of control because of the presumed academic benefits of their children's participation in these writing classes. PCC is intended to prepare students for high school writing, particularly in HARC, so that students can succeed there and be prepared for postsecondary writing experiences once they graduate high school. Parents who buy into these co-ops must surrender or negotiate both religious beliefs and academic expectations at home because of the presumed academic payoff for their children.

An opportunity available to 12-18 year old students in Colonial Homeschoolers is the Speak-Out NC debate team. I describe this program here because it reveals the rhetorical and oratorical training that homeschool students in this program receive and the complicated negotiations that occur when several people or groups become involved in literacy instruction. As mentioned already, the sponsorship of students in Speak-Out NC is complicated. The immediate sponsor is Colonial Homeschoolers, a Christian

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<sup>109</sup> Because I wish to maintain focus on the writing curriculum used at PCC, I do not discuss in detail their grammar curriculum. However, this is comprised of two courses (an "introductory grammar curricula" is currently being developed) that cover "the basics of grammar, punctuation, and usage" using the Analytical Grammar program ("2012-2013 Classes"). Use of this curriculum again wrests control of these literacies away from parents and places them in the hands of the facilitators of the course as well as the curriculum itself. Grammar at PCC is not a separate class but, instead, "[g]rammar is supported during the first half hour of our hour and a half writing Level 2 and Level 3 Writing Classes" ("2012-2013 Classes"). By combining these subjects, PCC emphasizes the related nature of writing and grammar; separating them with different curricula, however, emphasizes their *separateness*, an idea that current rhetoric and composition scholars would find outdated and ineffective.

organization for homeschoolers in the Chapel Hill area. An even larger sponsor, however, is the National Christian Forensics and Communications Association (NCFCA). This organization describes itself as:

an organization dedicated to facilitating communications-based competitive activities to homeschooled high schoolers, placing particular emphasis on excellence in academic and personal integrity as students learn to communicate more effectively. Our primary goal in NCFCA is to train students to be able to engage the culture for Christ. (“About NCFCA”)

Unlike the writing curriculum used in PCC, NCFCA, and subsequently Speak-Out NC, its affiliation in North Carolina, is a Christian homeschoolers organization that emphasizes oral communication as “the venue through which students learn to think critically, articulate winsomely and communicate graciously in a manner that pleases God” (“About NCFCA”). On a much larger scale, then, NCFCA blends personal beliefs with academic instruction much as PCC does, but it is even more overtly religious than even PCC. Parents who choose to allow their children to participate in Speak-Out NC not only entrust Colonial Homeschoolers to provide their children with beneficial experiences but they also must trust that NCFCA’s particular kind of instruction will be useful to their children. Because of the pervasive integration of particular religious beliefs with oral communication in this group, homeschooling parents who do not hold similar beliefs would be unlikely to enroll their children in this opportunity. The academic benefits, in other words, do not outweigh the emphasis on particular beliefs in NCFCA or Speak-Out NC.



In order to support participation in SpeakOut regional events and, theoretically, NCFCA national events, Speak-Out NC takes students' involvement seriously:

Because debate is an academic sport that requires both time and commitment, all debate participants will be required to do a significant amount of research, writing, and preparation to ensure that they are ready to debate in practice tournaments and at NCFCA Region 9 sanctioned events. Our club meetings will be spent practicing and assisting each other as we actively learn to debate more effectively. This team effort and sharing of cases, ideas, and strategies is highly encouraged so that all participants may benefit. (“About Speech and Debate”)

The commitment students must make to these activities is mirrored by the commitment parents must make to give up some control over their children's instruction. Since students must “do a significant amount of research, writing, and preparation” at home, parents whose children participate in Speak-Out NC must necessarily support these activities through home instruction or, at the very least, time away from home instruction to complete this work. Although the subjects of debates tend to be civic rather than faith-based,<sup>110</sup> the ultimate goal of participation in Speak-Out NC and NCFCA is to show how debate can be used to support Christian perspectives.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, Colonial Homeschoolers recommends that those who do not agree to a statement of beliefs “should not pursue membership in SpeakOut” (“Joining SpeakOut”). This rhetorical training, although it could be equally useful for non-Christian homeschooled students, is more focused on personal beliefs than academic preparation. Parents must subscribe to a certain worldview in order for them to view this instruction as valuable for their children.

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<sup>110</sup> For example, the 2013-2014 topics are “Resolved: That federal election law should be significantly reformed in the United States” and “Resolved: National security ought to be valued above freedom of the press” (“Debate”).

<sup>111</sup> For example, NCFCA's website displays the Nicene Creed as its statement of faith.

Even then, however, parents must support instruction from both Colonial Homeschoolers and NCFCA, complicating what they teach their children at home. Parental involvement is required at the weekly meetings of Speak-Out NC, and parents may actually express more control over their students' learning there than in PCC and HARC, where they do not attend their children's classes. Such control is tempered, however, because the meetings are geared toward preparing students for debates held through NCFCA. Consequently, parents are more aware of the work their children do in Speak-Out NC than in many other co-op classes, but this is primarily useful so that they can reinforce their children's preparation for formal debates. More than PCC or HARC, Speak-Out NC reinforces the connections between schooling and beliefs while also displaying how complicated literacy instruction becomes when different parties are involved.

The third prong of Colonial Homeschoolers' co-ops is HARC, a co-op intended for high school students. HARC is more dedicated to academic instruction than PCC, offering "the very best and most capable instructors available. Our instructors are not necessarily state-certified teachers but they are experts by training and experience in the field they teach" (Home page). Unlike PCC that relies on parent volunteers, HARC teachers (or "faculty" as they are tellingly named on the HARC website) actually have experiences that make them more qualified than typical homeschooling parents to teach the particular subjects they teach. For example, the principal writing and literature instructor, Deborah McKay, has a B.A. in English and a B.S. in Mathematics, and she has taught for fourteen years in private schools ("HARC Faculty"). Although her primary teaching area outside of HARC was in math, McKay has more credibility in teaching

HARC students than the parents who volunteer to teach PCC students because she has a background in English studies. Unlike in Legacy and Chapel Hill Homeschoolers co-ops, which do not identify English as a subject requiring expert teaching, HARC claims that it generally “is designed to help parents successfully meet the academic requirements that would ordinarily be difficult to cover only at home. Examples might be science labs, public speaking, foreign language and other courses in which a group setting and advanced expertise is required” (Home page). Writing is not mentioned here, but its inclusion in HARC’s class offerings indicates their acknowledgement that writing requires “advanced expertise” (Home page) that parents themselves may not have. In other words, HARC seeks to prepare students for college by providing instruction from specialists. This is markedly different from any of the other co-ops I discuss in this chapter in which parents serve as non-specialist teachers for groups of homeschooled students. HARC acknowledges that students are sometimes better served by instruction from teachers with background knowledge and experiences in a subject.<sup>112</sup>

Further indicating its academic focus, HARC emphasizes that it is “structured similar to a college” (Home page) by operating classes on a semester basis with two semesters per year. Unlike PCC or other co-ops that require participation, HARC offers courses on a course-by-course basis, providing more flexibility to homeschooling families who can take more control over their students’ literacies when allowed the

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<sup>112</sup> These instructors, to varying degrees, may still be non-specialists who simply have more knowledge and experience than typical homeschooling parents in some areas. For example, there is no indication that McKay and Haegele, the two writing instructors, are knowledgeable about first-year composition in postsecondary institutions or current writing scholarship, which could help them provide even more informed instruction to students in HARC.

option to choose how many courses their students take. The movement away from PCC's emphasis on community also taps into the academic focus found in HARC; it is more concerned with offering parents options to help their children succeed after high school than with building a community of homeschoolers. Although HARC claims that it is "committed to both Christian principles and academic excellence" (Home page), its Christian orientation is not nearly as strong as in Speak-Out NC and is even less prevalent than in PCC. Of the Colonial Homeschoolers' groups, HARC offers the most academic instruction and is also the least concerned with the personal beliefs of families involved. Parents who choose to enroll their children in these courses would have to consider whether they are comfortable with this level of focus on academic instruction when many turn to homeschooling in order to provide more personal schooling.

In the 2013-2014 school year, HARC offered five courses related to literacies and rhetoric: "English 1 – Introduction to Composition (Honors Course)," "English 2 – Literature and Composition (Honors Course)," "English 3 – American Literature," "English 4 – British Literature," and "Honors Analysis and Research Writing" ("HARC Classes"). For space purposes, I here focus on the three writing courses, although the literature courses would also offer valuable insights into literacy instruction offered in this co-op. The first course, "Honors Analysis and Research Writing," is taught by Jerry Haegele, who has a B.S. in secondary education and English and an M.S. in information sciences as well as experience teaching English at a Pennsylvania high school and work experience at IBM ("HARC Faculty"). The course description is rather long, but perhaps

most interesting because of its focus on teaching homeschooled students in HARC skills that they can potentially use in postsecondary English courses:

This course focuses on the best methods and techniques for a comprehensive understanding and implementation of research, analysis, and presentation. Writing a good research paper is essential at a university level yet so many students do not do it well or are not efficient in their execution of the required tasks. This course instructs students to write well, but to also perform research and analysis properly as necessary inputs to their papers or presentations. Many college courses require multiple long or short research papers, but many courses require PowerPoint presentations in lieu of or in addition to written papers. This course will equip students to use the same research and analysis methodology for both papers and presentations. It will instruct and give students experience to understand assignments, select topics, execute preliminary research to validate a topic or thesis, follow prescribed standards, conduct specific research, perform analysis of the research, outline and storyboard, and then actually write papers and presentations. Therefore, the goal is to prepare students to successfully complete college level research assignments with high achievement. (“HARC Course Descriptions”)

This course description is almost completely concerned with projections of future writing and research that students will complete in college. College-level work is characterized as always research-intensive and challenging, and is said to require both essays and presentations grounded in research. These are also things that the course description states not many students do well, reinforcing the idea that HARC offers educational experiences that go beyond instruction that students can receive in traditional schools. Haegele’s class speaks to concerns frequently in circulation about writing and research instruction,<sup>113</sup> such as going through a process to do research and develop essays and presentations. Furthermore, research is emphasized to such a degree that it attempts to familiarize students with multiple citation styles (MLA, APA, and Chicago) that may

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<sup>113</sup> See CCSS and the *Framework*.

prove useful to them in various college classrooms.<sup>114</sup> Throughout the description, college is seen as the justification for the work done in the course. Rather than offering the class in order to fulfill high school requirements, the class is intended to help students “successfully complete college level research assignments with high achievement.” Parents concerned with their children’s preparation for college would be told here that this course would adequately prepare their children for the research and writing experiences found in postsecondary institutions. Without further information about college writing, they must trust that these projections are correct and that this instruction will be as effective as the description claims it will be.

The other two writing courses in HARC are both taught by McKay and emphasize writing and writing about literature respectively. The description of the first, “Introduction to Composition,” states that students will:

receive instruction in close reading strategies for analyzing literary texts from a variety of genres, integrating grammar, vocabulary, and language usage into the process. Students will also learn to write narrative, descriptive, comparison/contrast, and persuasive papers, as well as a research paper emphasizing informational writing and documentation with MLA conventions. Public speaking skills will be developed through oral presentations and recitation of famous literary and historical speeches. (“HARC Course Descriptions”)

McKay also notes that students will use *Elements of Literature* as well as novels to accompany their writing in the course. College expectations are not emphasized in this

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<sup>114</sup> Haegele’s website for the course lists the course textbooks as Charles Lipson’s *Cite Right*, Kate L. Turabian et al.’s *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.), Peggy M. Houghton et al.’s *MLA: The Easy Way!*, MLA’s *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.), and Peggy M. Houghton and Timothy J. Houghton’s *APA: The Easy Way!* (“Honor Analysis and Research Textbooks”).

description as they are in the description for Haegele's course, although it is still apparent that the work is structured to prepare students for academic writing situations. The note that students will write a research paper including "documentation with MLA conventions" particularly speaks to this focus. The course description for "Literature and Composition" claims that students will "build on skills learned in English 1, mastering more sophisticated sentence structure and refining the writing process. Students will also begin preparation for the written section of the SAT with timed writing prompts. Public speaking skills will continue to be emphasized" ("HARC Course Descriptions").

*Elements of Literature* is again used in this course, creating continuity between classes in HARC. The addition to this course, timed writing, particularly speaks to parents' desires to prepare their children for college as it is specifically geared at helping students with the SAT, an important way homeschooled students show college admissions officers that they are adequately prepared for college instruction. Although McKay's courses are not as explicitly aimed to prepare students for college as Haegele's, they still very much assume that parents send their children to HARC in order to help them learn writing skills that will translate to college.

HARC does not blend literacies with religious ideologies as much as Speak-Out NC or Legacy. Therefore, non-Christian homeschooling families would not have their secular valuing of their children's literacies undermined by religious ideologies in HARC unless individual instructors taught courses in religious-specific ways. HARC's sponsorship of literacies, consequently, is largely more academic than religious, or, in other words, is more public than personal. When parents send their children to HARC,

they expect that their children will receive preparation for literacies they will be expected to use in postsecondary educational institutions. An important aspect of HARC, therefore, is that it helps parents construct a vision of college writing instruction that they can help their students plan for.

### **Contested Control in Literacy Instruction**

Surrendering control of their children's literacies may be a necessary prerequisite for homeschooling parents whose children desire to attend postsecondary institutions unless those parents are sufficiently experienced to provide such literacy instruction themselves. As non-specialist writing instructors, homeschooling parents often turn to co-ops to fill educational gaps that they cannot at home. For parents who choose informal co-ops, their needs are primarily focused on providing a communal aspect to education. Those who choose academic co-ops are much more concerned with preparing their children for college writing instruction. In neither type of co-op, however, is the personal or the academic completely ignored. These are simply handled in different ways that allow parents varying degrees of control over not just the instruction that occurs in the co-op but also the instruction that they offer at home.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> An interesting note is that some larger co-ops can become so popular that they become private schools. Grace Academy in Charlotte, NC is one such example. It is available to students either as a full-time private school or as supplementary courses for homeschoolers and offers online courses in addition to face-to-face courses (Home page). This is a path that some larger co-ops such as HARC may take as homeschool parents become more dependent on the freedom from course planning that co-ops offer and as they surrender and endorse the control over education that these co-ops have.



When parents do decide to enroll their children in co-op courses, decisions about what to emphasize in this instruction is less up to them. Instead, they must determine how to approach the instruction their children receive, either integrating it into their own approach to writing instruction or partially amending this instruction at home. For example, students taking Legacy's *Chronicles of Narnia* class would complete reading at home, taking time away from their parents' instruction. Co-op courses can impact instruction at home, especially in academic co-ops, because parents often choose to reinforce what co-ops teach as they help students with homework and determine how to meld work at home on other days with work in co-ops. For example, in Anthony's study of six homeschooling families, he found that these families all heavily relied on the co-op they were part of to structure their home instruction. In fact, one of the families he studies, the Harbors, provided 90% of their daughter's curriculum through the co-op (249). Some co-ops, such as MASC and HARC, even point out that parents will be expected to take on the role of supporters when their children take these writing classes due to the amount of work children must complete at home. Even without these cautions, parents are unlikely to reject co-op instruction because it is something they spend time and money on and because contradictions could be potentially disruptive to their children's education.

Literacy negotiations become much more complicated as others become involved and overlay their assumptions about home and school literacies into writing instruction. Teachers do have a central role in the development of literacy learning, particularly in, as this examination of homeschool co-ops shows, controlling to some extent the ways

parents and students view and use literacies. This influence makes some homeschooling parents hesitant to participate in co-ops (see Houk, Koeser and Marse, and Topp).

Certainly literacy instruction becomes more complicated when parents must account for their own decisions, which are already difficult, as well as those that others make about what their children learn. Anthony claims that participation in a co-op represented “a compromise for the families [he studies] between the almost total freedom of home schooling and the accountability and support provided by a traditional school” (251).

This was a compromise that they welcomed but that not all homeschooling parents do.

Not only do parents have to give up some control to co-ops, but sometimes they also must surrender some control to outside organizations, such as NCSLMA and NCFCA.

Doing so is not easy, especially because homeschooling parents are keenly aware that their children’s academic futures, and aspects of their entire lives, are in their hands.

Juggling these sometimes competing values about literacy instruction can also be difficult for parents as they try to reconcile what they believe and teach about literacies with what others believe and teach.

Added pressure comes from parents’ concerns with preparing their children for college, which is often viewed as a great leap for homeschooled students that they must cross by engaging in specific types of instruction, including specific types of writing instruction. As non-specialist writing teachers, homeschooling parents aren’t often knowledgeable about the writing skills that their children will need. Co-ops, therefore, can serve the important role of helping parents determine what types of instruction their children will need to enter college writing situations successfully and can offer this

instruction in a group setting. This instruction allows homeschooling parents to provide their children with writing instruction from those who are more knowledgeable about writing, even if those instructors are still not specialists grounded in composition theory. One of the important functions of some co-ops, therefore, is their helping parents imaginatively construct what college writing expectations are and how to help their children prepare for them.

Unlike in other spaces – such as postsecondary institutions – homeschooling parents have the option to pull their children out of co-ops without any tangible backlash such as failing grades or expulsion from a college. Therefore, homeschooling parents retain ultimate control over their children’s literacy instruction. Many parents, however, desire the additional help that co-ops can provide not only in familiarizing their children with group classes and social interactions but also in constructing a vision of college writing expectations. The cost of these benefits is dealing with the literacy instruction that co-ops offer and determining how to reconcile this education with the schooling that parents offer at home. Hagander-Luanava is to some degree correct when she says that individual co-ops are about the classes, but it’s important to remember that, just as with all instruction, people’s decisions lie behind what classes are offered and why. The ways individuals see schooling as connected to their personal beliefs and the ways they project future writing situations necessarily influences what students in co-ops learn. Parents must navigate what types of control they are willing to give up and how to resolve home and co-op instruction as they try to offer their children a quality education that can prepare them for their future lives, whatever those entail. As more people become

involved in this instruction, the decisions they make become more complex and difficult to negotiate.

## CHAPTER IV

### HOMESCHOOL IDENTITIES: NEGOTIATING THE PERSONAL AND THE SOCIAL

If you are truly interested in homeschooling, please ask whatever questions you have in a respectful way. This is a homeschooling support board. We homeschoolers or those who want to learn more about homeschooling come here for answers and support. We don't come here to debate what is the best way to educate a child. If you read more posts, you will see that each of us has our own unique style, BUT we respect each other and we offer ideas and encouragement. That is what these boards are for. I'm sorry if you got the wrong impression. ("New to HS")

The epigraph to this chapter appears in an online forum on *Homeschool.com* intended for homeschoolers to exchange information about homeschooling high school students. This writer, an anonymous Guest, is responding to posts from another participant on the forum, laserprecision, who went to public school. In the exchange (discussed further in the next chapter), laserprecision enters into a conversation about what a typical day of high school looks like and is caught up in a heated exchange about what is appropriate behavior on this forum. One of the interesting aspects of this particular post is the tenacity with which the anonymous poster, Guest, defends the online community created by homeschoolers and its mission, which he or she defines as a space for homeschoolers "or those who want to learn more about homeschooling" to find "answers and support" and to "offer ideas and encouragement." Although laserprecision may be someone who wants to learn more about homeschooling, Guest regards his

intrusion into the conversation as working against the mission of this online space. By the end of the conversation, several other participants have joined Guest in their defense of this online community and laserprecision has been put on the defensive, eventually leaving the ongoing conversation.

What this discussion thread illustrates is how homeschooling parents set themselves up as a counterpublic in which they craft a space to discuss their departure from the norm, education taking place in the home. This chapter examines the online identities assumed by homeschoolers in *Homeschool.com*'s "Homeschooling Through High School" forums, focusing particularly on those that explicitly discuss writing instruction. Not all homeschoolers in this forum conceive of its mission in the same ways or use it for the same ends. Generally, however, the goals identified by Guest above align with the ways information about writing is discussed in this forum as well as the conventions of a counterpublic. In chapter one, I discuss Habermas's ideas of the public sphere and how homeschooling parents reclaim the private sphere as a space that helps children learn how to participate in the public sphere through parents' educational choices. Whereas parents use education to prepare their children for public sphere activities, such as debates and political involvement, homeschooling itself can be viewed as a counterpublic. Frank Farmer defines a counterpublic as having "an oppositional relationship to other, more dominant publics; a marginal, subaltern, or excluded status within the larger public; and an identity wrought by, and refined through, the reflexive circulation of texts" (21). Although homeschooling families do not always fit the second criteria Farmer sets forth because they are not necessarily excluded from the larger public

sphere (except voluntarily), as a group they espouse ideas that oppose those found in the dominant public about education and they craft an identity largely through texts.

Increasingly, these texts are found online as homeschoolers use the Internet to connect across geographical areas. The *Homeschool.com* forum is one site in which homeschoolers develop their identity as a counterpublic through written conversations that represent both “withdrawal and regroupment” (Fraser 68) from the dominant public as is seen in the previous post and “bases and training grounds for agitational activities” (Fraser 68). These activities, for homeschooling parents, are comprised on this forum of the particular ways that they educate their children rather than what may be viewed as more extreme activities such as protests or boycotts (although homeschoolers have participated in these).

Neither Farmer nor Fraser consider the exclusionary aspect of counterpublics. As this forum conversation illustrates, homeschooling parents who form the counterpublic can be exclusionary, keeping those who do not support their educational ideals from engaging in the counterpublic. Such people as lacerprecision are seen as belonging to the public sphere proper, which endorses traditional public education. This is a perceived threat to the mission homeschooling parents have undertaken of providing education in homes and it threatens the community that they collectively form. Debates about “the best way to educate a child” sometimes appear on this forum, but only if users ask about specific scenarios they find themselves in. Put differently, homeschooling as an educational choice *writ large* is not up for debate on this forum because it does not align with this counterpublic’s educational ideals. Instead, users assume that others

participating are, as Guest says, homeschoolers or those interested in homeschooling who have similar ideas about parents' – and sometimes children's – freedom to choose homeschooling as a viable educational option. The identities assumed by users on *Homeschool.com* conform to this mission, despite the pedagogical and ideological differences often very apparent in users' posts. Those like laserprecision who do not adapt to and, in his case, who question this identity are often excluded. Doing so keeps this counterpublic intact so that it can continue to support the ways homeschooling parents question the dominant public's views of education, especially through their continued homeschooling.

Online spaces such as *Homeschool.com* are an important way that homeschooling parents form a counterpublic through texts, including asynchronous written conversations. Scholars from various fields have discussed the ways that people interact in online spaces. Early in the 1990s, Howard Rheingold optimistically claims in *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* that virtual communities formed through computer-mediated communications (CMC) could revitalize the public sphere by helping to “build stronger, more humane communities” (300). One of the ways this could occur which Rheingold does not mention, likely because he envisions the Internet being used primarily to reinforce *the* public sphere is through the formation of counterpublics, which bring together groups of people commonly overlooked. Rheingold argues, “The technology that makes virtual communities possible has the potential to bring enormous leverage to ordinary citizens at relatively little cost” (4). For example, homeschooling parents and others use online spaces today to form stronger and broader



counterpublics. Writing at the dawn of widespread Internet access, however, Rheingold does not articulate many of the problems with online community building that have been discussed more recently.

Feminist scholars have been particularly suspicious of a utopian vision of the Internet and other technologies. Susan DeLaGrange argues in her 2011 book *Technologies of Wonder* that although Rheingold and more contemporary scholars such as Michael Lewis and Clay Shirky envision the Internet as a democratic and open space ripe for innovation and access, the material effects of these technologies are not always positive. For example, she points out that developers of technology such as Hewlett Packard and Apple “flaunt the ever-increasing speed and versatility of their machines while taking no notice of the cheap and sometimes dangerous labor of the Asian workforce that produces their microprocessors and motherboards” (4). The technological advances made thus come at a steep price to those who produce these technologies. Furthermore, DeLaGrange debates the supposedly leveling effect of technologies that are produced and available to users:

Although digital technologies like wikis, websites, and weblogs, and multimedia software programs such as Photoshop, Dreamweaver, Final Cut, and Flash, have the potential to be revolutionary and empowering for some, in the long run the uses to which new technologies are put often re-inscribe previous culturally constructed norms of gender, race, and class, thus continuing to disproportionately empower members of the already dominant discourse community—which in technological fields in the U.S. consists primarily of white males. (4-5)

Whereas Rheingold and other scholars see the Internet as opening up possibilities for more people to be involved in the public sphere, DeLaGrange asks us to remain skeptical

of the supposedly democratic work technologies do.<sup>116</sup> When examining how homeschoolers participate in their own counterpublics online, therefore, it is important to remember that these interactions are not occurring outside of the material world but, rather, intersect with it, particularly because they participate in online discussions about teaching that they typically provide face-to-face with their children.<sup>117</sup> Counterpublics that occur in online spaces do not just have online implications; they intersect with and influence decisions that people make in the non-virtual world.

Although homeschoolers vary widely in their religious and political affiliations, pedagogical approaches, and socioeconomic situations (as I've pointed to throughout this project), these many identities are often subsumed in online homeschool forums by their identification with other homeschoolers, a process Kenneth Burke describes in *A Rhetoric of Motives*. He posits that in order for people to agree with one another, they have to

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<sup>116</sup> Laura J. Gurak and Sherry Turkle make similar arguments about the effects of technology on people and their lives. In *Cyberliteracy: Navigating the Internet with Awareness*, Gurak claims, "Technologies have consequences, and the Internet is no exception. To be cyberliterate, we must be alert to the ways in which the Internet is changing our connection to our physical lives. And in doing so, we must make choices about what sort of activities are appropriate for cyberspace and what sort are better experienced in the physical world" (159). Turkle coins the popular phrase "life on the screen" to describe the ways in which people's experiences online and in the physical world are becoming blurred, particularly in multi-user domains or MUDs. She claims that MUDs are just one way that computer-mediated communication is being used for the "construction and reconstruction" of identities (14), with people using onscreen lives "to become comfortable with new ways of thinking about evolution, relationships, sexuality, politics, and identity" (26). These views about the boundaries between online spaces and physical lives are useful to consider in relation to how homeschoolers interact in online spaces about problems in the physical world of homeschooling their children.

<sup>117</sup> As I discuss in the first chapter, most homeschoolers have computers available to them and are connected to the Internet. Online forums are particularly important places where this counterpublic is created and perpetuated through conversations homeschooling parents have.

partially identify with each other or see how they are similar to each other. Such an identification process is often easy for homeschooling parents, who come to this forum with the explicit desire to talk to parents who are going through or have gone through similar situations. In the threads, homeschooling parents identify themselves as both parents, a familial and personal identity, and as teachers, a public identity. Part of their task in conversations is thinking through tensions between these two identities and how these may manifest in writing instruction with like-minded people. Parents' attempts to negotiate tensions between what they want to teach their children and what they think they need to teach their children can be seen as navigations of their identities as parent-teachers. They assume parent-teacher identities as part of belonging to the homeschooling counterpublic even as they try to work through what this identity means and how it influences the writing instruction that they offer.

Because I take a more qualitative approach to the analysis of these forum posts than other scholars who similarly analyze discourse such as Jeffrey T. Grabill and Stacey Pigg, ethnographic approaches can helpfully interact with the discourse analysis methods I employ. Instead of analyzing actual units of language in depth, I mine the online forums to discover what homeschooling parents say about instruction in general and writing instruction specifically as well as to understand how they try to negotiate private and public concerns as they consider the instruction they offer. Beverly A. Moss argues, "the goal of an ethnographer is to study, explore, and describe a group's culture" (155) and the "ultimate goal" is "to describe a particular community so that an outsider sees it as a native would and so that the community studied can be compared to other communities"

(155). Although I obviously do not describe the entire culture of homeschooling in this chapter (!), my analysis of the interactions that occur on this forum show how homeschoolers interact about writing instruction and what they are concerned with as they choose writing instruction so that we can consider how these concerns mirror those of other writing instructors. Similarly, in “‘What Goes on Here?’ The Uses of Ethnography in Composition Studies,” Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater claims that the ethnographer’s key question is “‘What goes on here?’ as they investigate how people acquire and use language inside and outside of academic contexts – within families and communities” (204). She and other ethnographers typically use primary research in communities of people to answer this question. In this chapter, I answer this question by turning to a modified form of discourse analysis to examine what goes on in online spaces when homeschoolers talk about writing and what this can tell us about their approaches to writing instruction. Rather than identifying “how language gets recruited ‘on site’ to enact specific social activities and social identities” (Gee, *An Introduction* 1) as discourse analysis does, my methodology seeks insights into the counterpublic of homeschoolers that is partially constructed through interactions such as the ones I examine here. Graham Smart explains such an approach: “interpretive ethnography provides a unique approach to discourse analysis, one that allows researchers to explore and describe in detail the social contexts within which texts are produced, read, and used in activities of learning and knowledge-making” (57). Homeschooling parents’ written interactions on these forums reveal some of the ways homeschooling parents

collaboratively reconcile personal concerns with future projections of children's needs as they make pedagogical decisions.

In the rest of this chapter, I examine postings on *Homeschool.com* about English and writing instruction in order to provide a portrait of parents' negotiations of personal and public concerns as they determine how to teach their children. I categorize their concerns into three common topics found in this particular counterpublic: first, the writing pedagogies homeschooling parents choose, which often circulate around personal decisions about their students' abilities to teach themselves; second, writing curricula used, which address both personal concerns with instruction and public concerns about children's preparation for college writing; and third, the outsourcing of writing instruction, which revolves around public issues of parents giving up control over instruction for the supposed benefits of children's college readiness. The second and third provide an additional layer of information to my own analysis of writing curricula and homeschool co-ops in chapters two and three of this project, illustrating some of the decision-making processes parents go through when making choices about curricula and co-ops. I follow this analysis with a discussion of homeschooling parents' status as non-specialist writing instructors and how they attempt to talk through tensions between what they want to teach their children and what they think they need to teach their children so that their children can succeed in future life plans, particularly college. This analysis illustrates the many concerns – both personal and public – that all writing instructors must navigate as they determine how to teach writing and emphasizes the importance of

instructors considering both what they want to teach students as well as what their students' future lives dictate they should learn.

### ***Homeschool.com Forums***

*Homeschool.com* is the self-proclaimed “#1 Homeschooling Community.” Co-founded in 1997 by Rebecca Kochenderfer,<sup>118</sup> this website offers many services such as articles about homeschooling, a blog, links to resources, and – my focus in this chapter – forums. According to the forum homepage, there are over 10,000 forum members<sup>119</sup> who have posted over 44,000 times in over 6,400 topics<sup>120</sup> in 24 forums. Participation in these forums can be sporadic, but posts are current and ongoing. For example, on November 8, 2013, the most recent post had been written on November 6, 2013. There are many different forum boards, including diverse topics such as “Getting Started,” “Special Needs,” “Used Curriculum,” and “Homeschooling Styles” (see Figure 1 below). I focus on one board, “Homeschooling Through High School,” to pinpoint discussions about writing primarily focused on high school students. Doing so not only aligns with my focus in other chapters on high school students but also highlights the unique issues confronted by homeschooling parents who are teaching writing to older students facing imminent transitions to college or to working lives. This particular forum contains 1,662

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<sup>118</sup> The other co-founder is unnamed on the website.

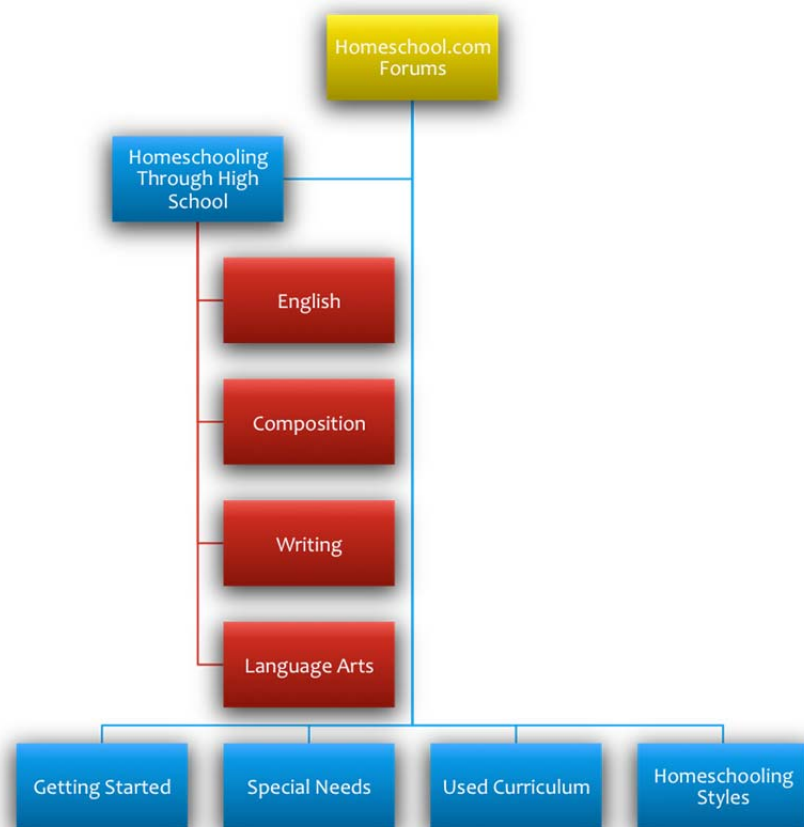
<sup>119</sup> This number does not include those who look at the forums and post as “Guests,” so the number of users is actually higher. For example, on November 8, 2013, at 9:20pm there were 0 members but 4 guests actively participating in the forums.

<sup>120</sup> Topics are frequently known as threads in other online spaces. These are conversations begun by one user and continued by others responding to the initial post. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I refer to these as “threads” even though this forum uses the term “topic.”

posts in 323 different threads with the most recent post occurring, as of November 8, 2013, on October 22, 2013. These numbers illustrate that the forum, while it experiences some times with less traffic, represents a large community of homeschoolers who not only gather together as a counterpublic but who also collect in various sub-groups.<sup>121</sup> The ways these groups function as a community with members who identify with one another is apparent through the information exchanges. The “Homeschooling Through High School” forum serves as one facet of the homeschooling counterpublic that brings together homeschoolers and those interested in homeschooling who want information about how they can or should homeschool their older children.

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<sup>121</sup> I consider the entire homeschooling community a counterpublic. Throughout this chapter, for the sake of clarity I specifically refer to those interacting on this forum as a counterpublic, even though it is really a segment of the homeschooling counterpublic.



*Figure 1. Chart of Homeschool.com Forum Search*

In order to identify topics to examine, I performed a search of the “Homeschooling Through High School” forum using the keywords “writing,” “composition,” “English,” and “language arts” (see Figure 1 above). This wasn’t an exact science, especially given the many posts that include the word “writing” but do not address writing instruction,<sup>122</sup> but it yielded 36 threads to examine with 320 posts or approximately 20% of the posts on this forum. These were written from September 14,

<sup>122</sup> These often revolved around writing transcripts or, in one case, writing graduation announcements.



2005 to September 20, 2012<sup>123</sup> and threads range from two posts to twenty-five.<sup>124</sup>

Exchanges occurred between varying numbers of users, usually with two, three, or more users interacting in one thread. Not all threads or posts directly relate to writing or language arts instruction, but all threads include posts that discuss these types of instruction in some ways. As homeschooling parents discussed their instruction, they continually touched upon the difficulties of balancing their students' needs, their own pedagogical inclinations, and the writing requirements they anticipate colleges having. Talking with others in this forum helped them draw on the collective wisdom of the group, particularly when speaking to more experienced homeschooling parents who had children in college. Disagreements that emerge about education and writing instruction, however, reveal the complexities of negotiating these concerns, even within a group of primarily like-minded individuals devoted to the similar projects of schooling their children at home. For writing instructors who teach outside of such a tightly-knit community, steering through a minefield of differences about writing instruction can be even more vexed.

### *Writing Pedagogies*

As homeschooled students enter high school and subjects become more difficult, homeschooling parents often consider to what extent they should direct schooling and to

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<sup>123</sup> This is quite a long span of time, spanning seven years. Some may argue that it is too great a span of time to be a reliable data set; however, because the same issues reappeared in posts over this time span, I find them all relevant to this discussion.

<sup>124</sup> I chose not to examine posts that never received replies because these did not, of course, contain much information about writing instruction by homeschoolers or the ways they were trying to negotiate various concerns when discussing this instruction.

what extent students can be self-taught. Discussions about this issue revolve around what is best for students, especially when parents do not have time to supervise their children's instruction as much as teachers in schools might. For example, Cindy Wallis, one of the homeschooling mothers in Kunzman's study of conservative Christian homeschoolers, says after admitting that she didn't direct her daughter Linda's work very much, "I wasn't quite as active in the "schooling" as I would've liked to be. However, to my knowledge, most homeschool students Linda's age do a good deal of self-teaching" (Kunzman 183). The difficulty of schoolwork is a central issue; for homeschooling parents, most of whom are not trained teachers, more advanced work can be difficult to teach because it has often been years since they had to do similar work, if they ever did. This concern, particularly relevant because of homeschooling parents' status as non-specialist and untrained teachers, can be seen in my following discussions about threads on *Homeschool.com* concerning how much direction or help to give high school students and how to grade writing, a difficult aspect of writing instruction. Discussions about these topics revolve around personal concerns homeschooling parents have with their own level of familiarity with work as well as with their desire to give their older children more responsibility for this work. Homeschooling parents in this counterpublic help each other understand what is at stake with the level of direction given in instruction generally and writing instruction specifically. Although no consensus is reached (and, indeed, consensus isn't really the intention as much as identification and knowledge-making in this counterpublic), homeschooling parents share ideas with one another about how much

direction their high school students need and what the benefits of more or less direction are.

One homeschooling mother, BeachMom,<sup>125</sup> who is looking for help as her daughter completes eighth grade and prepares to enter high school, begins one thread. Another user, CNBarnes, who claims that he has homeschooled his children since 1994 and has two daughters in college and one high school junior, replies to her initial post about how to manage high school-level instruction with the answer that high school students need much less direction and, therefore, teaching in high school is actually easier than teaching younger students:

To be honest, homeschooling through their high school years was actually EASIER than in elementary or middle school. By the time they reached this age, they were much more adept at being able to “learn on their own” Which<sup>126</sup> to me is one of the biggest goals we as parents have – much more important than the details of any particular subject. This means we only had to “set their course” for the subjects and where we expected them to be in certain time frames – actually making progress became their responsibility (also a good thing). We only had to be around for those times they got stuck (something that was very infrequent). (“Preparing to Home School High School”)

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<sup>125</sup> In my discussions of interactions on *Homeschool.com*, I assume specific gender pronouns when user names or post content directly indicates these. As has often been pointed out, however, any person can assume almost any online identity (see Saco and Turkle). I recognize the possibility that some of these users represent themselves in ways that differ from their physical selves, but I use specific personal pronouns when it seems appropriate for ease of reading about parents’ online interactions.

<sup>126</sup> Throughout this chapter, I do not comment on grammatical issues and typos that are common in this kind of online discourse, whether on this particular forum or in other spaces. This is both for ease of reading and because I see no need to draw unnecessary attention to writing mistakes that commonly occur in online comments and discussions not just here but generally in online environments.

Here, CNBarnes tells BeachMom (and any other readers) that in high school, homeschooling parents are primarily responsible for telling their students what work to do and how quickly to do it, a more supervisory than hands-on approach to teaching. Students themselves primarily take up the learning process unless they get “stuck” and need parents’ assistance.

Kunzman questions the point of view that parents are supervisors rather than teachers when considering the little direction that Cindy Wallis gives her daughter Linda:

Even self-directed students sometimes need guidance and modeling on how to approach their learning, what questions to ask and which areas to probe more deeply. This type of inquiry isn’t likely to happen when Linda is pretty much just moving from chapter to chapter on her own, answering recall-oriented questions. (171)

Kunzman points out that students will learn more through help with their thinking processes aided by a teacher, but this is something that CNBarnes overlooks. Instead, he views school as an accumulation of information, which students can readily learn on their own. The type of curriculum used by CNBarnes isn’t mentioned, which seems like an important point to gloss over when discussing how directed learning can or should be. For example, some curricula are written with the knowledge that parents may be teaching themselves material to then teach their children or that children may be teaching themselves (for example, Institute for Excellence in Writing). Others are written with the intention that parents serve as teachers to their students (such as Brave Writer). The different roles parents can take on as supervisors or teachers isn’t thoroughly explained in

this thread, but CNBarnes clearly advocates that parents of high school students see themselves more as advisors than as teachers.

Even BeachMom doesn't completely buy CNBarnes's argument, replying, "High School easier than elementary school? Hmm, I think it's the setting the course and sticking it to it for 4 years that scares me" ("Preparing to Home School High School"). Paying more attention to the social concerns with college than the personal concerns with teaching, she redirects the forum away from the level of direction high school students need to what subjects need to be covered in order for her daughter to go to college. CNBarnes defends his answer: "I was thinking more of the day-to-day 'teaching' that goes on. Since it's more student/self taught w/direction from mom and less 'mom taught', it IS easier" ("Preparing to Home School High School") followed with a winking smiley face emoticon. At this point, the discussion about direction ends and the rest of the thread focuses on information about college requirements and assigning grades to completed work. BeachMom successfully pulls attention away from what her student learns, which is still an important concern, to how home instruction feeds into college expectations. Although the thread begins with concerns that seem more home-oriented, the direction the conversation takes reveals how homeschooling parents are concerned with how directed instruction should be primarily in thinking about how to prepare their students for college-level instruction.

The role of parents in instruction is focused on more squarely in another thread. One user, antiques55, who is on his or her second day of homeschooling, feels anxious about the work his or her son is doing. This anxiety is primarily centered on his or her

lack of “instructional time” with the student because the user, for an unexplained reason, is not around to teach him but, instead, simply assigns work and checks that his or her son completes it. Another user, *elliemaejune*, who is also *Homeschool.com*’s forum moderator and quite active on the forum’s threads, replies, “Many people self-educate and seem to turn out fine :-) Have you looked over his work to see if he completed his assignments correctly? Let me reassure you that we all feel overwhelmed the second day :-)” (“Feeling a Little Overwhelmed”). Her response indicates that there is a minimal standard that homeschooling parents should uphold regardless of time constraints, which is that they must see if students are actually doing their work “correctly.” Even self-taught students, therefore, must have some sort of parental oversight if not constant interaction between parent and student, which *CNBarnes* in the previous thread indicates when he says that parents should be around to assign work, check it, and provide instruction if needed. There are no further responses to this thread, but *antiques55*’s question illustrates the difficulty homeschooling parents have of ascertaining how to best teach their children at home, particularly if local circumstances shape their instruction in particular ways (such as *antiques55*’s lack of time at home). In this instance, *Elliemaejune* reinforces the importance of parents in their children’s instruction, even if simply as supervisors who determine if work has been satisfactorily completed. Personal concerns such as available time do influence homeschooling parents’ instruction, often in ways that they are not completely comfortable with as they try to balance their desire to homeschool with the ways they think they need to homeschool their children in order for them to be successful later in life.

Other posts reveal specific ways that homeschooling parents direct their students in learning to write, particularly as they consider academic preparation. One user, shelldrake111, tells others that his or her son is going to a charter school the next year, indicating the need for instruction in the home to prepare him for this experience. Shelldrake111 states, “I do alot of focus on reading and comprehension and proper writing skills and spelling, so it seems he can follow instruction very well and work more independently because of that. If you can read and write,..you can learn” (“Going Back to a Good High School”). Here, this homeschooling parent identifies following instructions as well as working independently necessary overall abilities that children learn in school. He or she also identifies specific literacy activites – reading, comprehension, writing skills, and spelling – that his or her son has learned in order to prepare for charter school. These are very broad skills that many homeschooling parents would likely identify as necessary for their children to learn in preparation for other schooling experiences.

Different posts indicate a more laid-back approach to writing instruction that focuses on students’ personal connection to learning and enjoyment of literacy activities rather than their academic preparation. Peaceroots says about his or her eighth grade son who just left public school mid-year: “Right now I’m giving him time to decompress after a stressful 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter . . . He watched the inauguration [in 2009], we discussed it afterward and he wrote a few things he took away from it . . . He’s read for 30 min to an hour a day. I’ve also used this time to get him used to using his email and use the teen forum here” (“Standards and Lessons”). Here, literacy instruction is aimed to pull this student out of the structure of public school and to allow him room to connect to subjects

such as the Presidential inauguration on a more personal level. Unlike shelldrake111 who is preparing his or her son for a charter school, peaceroots is going through the exact opposite process of acclimating his or her son to schooling at home, which allows more freedom from very structured literacy instruction. Peaceroots also acknowledges that he or she doesn't have money to purchase "a program" but that they will for the next year, indicating that this movement away from structure is temporary. Indeed, the focus is one allowing this student time to acclimate to the home environment as school before jumping into more academic, structured instruction. Elliamaejune welcomes peaceroots to the forum and says, "IMHO [in my humble opinion] it would not be a good thing to neglect his general education" ("Standards and Lessons"), which she identifies as math, English, science, history, and government. Unlike her interaction with antiques55, ellimaejune has more trouble with peaceroots's failure to assign organized work than to antiques55's hands-off approach to teaching. Therefore, ellimaejune represents one point of view, which is rather important since she serves as a forum moderator, that homeschooling parents have a duty to structure their children's schooling, even if they leave children to complete their own work within this framework. The concern in this case is with how well students are being academically prepared for future experiences instead of their enjoyment of schooling.

One other thread discusses writing instruction in particular and offers a counterpoint to the perspective that homeschooling is more about establishing appropriate work to help students prepare for their futures than teaching students. This thread begins with a user asking how it will affect his or her daughter's future if she is homeschooled



through high school. After several posts about this matter, cpcherokee redirects the thread to focus on his or her seventh grade son's problems with completing work at home. The user claims that his or her son's lack of focus has resulted in "unschooling" more or less, and the description of his schooling focuses on his resistance to homeschooling and his desire to return to public school. Toward the middle of this description, cpcherokee says, "He reads real well but not fast, and he can't stand writing. And you know everything else is based on reading and writing. He says it's hard for him to explain, but it is too hard for him to process the information" ("If Home School Through H/School Yrs"). He or she implies that good writers are generally good learners, which is clearly not always true.<sup>127</sup> One reply by chessie15 suggests going back a couple grade levels to catch him up and reading to him, both techniques she used with her daughter, which draws attention to the ease with which parents can cater instruction to their children's specific levels of need. Even if instruction is intended to help students attain certain academic standards, it can be catered to individual students quite easily if parents understand how to alter instruction to fit their students' needs.

Another reply by SarahNZ relates that her daughter went through a similar problem in a traditional school: "She felt like she could not write well enough so I scribed for her. I told her teachers that I was doing that, and they didn't like it but they didn't stop us, as her work was being handed in for a change!!!" ("If Home School Through

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<sup>127</sup> Nowacek and Soliday in particular critique the idea that all writing instruction is unilaterally transferable to other rhetorical situations, concluding that writing well in one situation does not necessarily indicate a student's ability to write well in another situation. This can be carried further here to critique the claim that good readers and writers are generally good learners, a theory unsupported by current composition theory (see also Cleary and Driscoll).

H/School Yrs”). There is no indication of whether this user homeschools now or why she is on a homeschooling forum if she does not, but this explanation reveals a technique she used with her child in a traditional school setting. After this recounting, she states, “I not going to tell you what to do, (I hate that) but a suggestion is to get workbooks and do unit studies with him where you are scribe. You do the writing and read it back to him to hear it. My dd [dear daughter] likes this and says it helps coz she can talk and think way quicker than she can write or type” (“If Home School Through H/School Yrs”). These clear suggestions provide cpcherokee with specific strategies to use with his or her son, useful ways to help meet him at his point of need. However, one issue in this thread points to the non-specialist status of homeschooling parents, which is the overlooking of the possibility that cpcherokee’s son has an undiagnosed learning disability. When chessie15 and SarahNZ give suggestions about changing instruction to fit cpcherokee’s son’s, they draw attention to possible problems he may be having without asking what the underlying cause of these problems might be. Homeschooling parents are seldom professionally trained and, therefore, would not easily recognize learning disabilities, especially in their own children when they are more focused on the problem (difficulty with reading and writing) rather than the cause of the problem. Even though chessie15 and SarahNZ attempt to help cpcherokee through their suggestions for ways to help his or her son learn to read and write, they do not suggest the possibility that an undiagnosed learning disability may be a factor in cpcherokee’s son’s difficulties. As parents try to determine how to structure learning both for personal and academic needs, their lack of

training in some areas, such as the ability to recognize learning disabilities, can limit their ability to choose literacy instruction that is most effective for their children.<sup>128</sup>

Grading is another vexed issue for homeschooling parents because grades don't matter as they do in traditional schools. Rather than assigning grades, homeschooling parents typically direct attention to what their students can and cannot do. This can be seen in the WriteShop curriculum, in which feedback sheets do assign grades but in which parents are told to allow students the opportunity to revise work until it is satisfactory (see chapter two). Cindy Wallis, a homeschooling mother in Kunzman's study, discusses the evaluation of writing:

Well, I'm not a licensed teacher, but I've done a lot of writing and I used to edit for a magazine, if you're talking about grammatical errors and things like that. Plus there are lists of rules that I can look up, too, if I'm questioning something. And I'm not really very concerned with that with her [her daughter], because she reads so much and she writes stories for fun and her grammar is good. (165)

Wallis's approach is to center writing instruction on grammar, which is typically easier to correct than higher-order concerns such as organization or logical development of a paper. Although Wallis seems satisfied with the writing instruction her daughter receives, other homeschoolers are more concerned about giving feedback on the writing their students do, especially as they try to determine what will help their students best develop as writers.

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<sup>128</sup> A thorough examination of how homeschooling parents treat their students' learning disabilities could take up entire projects. Here, I am concerned with what discussions on this forum show us about homeschooling parents' status as non-specialist literacy instructors who are or are not equipped to shift instruction for students with learning disabilities, not with how homeschooling parents generally handle their children's learning disabilities.

One user, dvp4, asks for help with his or her high school daughter who has Attention Deficit Disorder, demonstrating that some homeschooling parents recognize the learning disabilities that their children have. About evaluating writing, he or she asks:

We also need help with writing essays and papers. I am not experienced with teaching, let alone being able to make corrections and giving suggestions in this area. I have looked at [home2teach.com](http://home2teach.com) and [writeathome.com](http://writeathome.com)...has anyone used either of these services with success? What other options might I have? (“Please Help with a Few Questions”)

Here, dvp4 recognizes that teaching writing is about more than grammar or making “corrections” and also involves “giving suggestions.” He or she exposes him or herself as a non-specialist instructor who is inexperienced with providing feedback on writing, leading to the consideration of outsourcing writing instruction because of discomfort with this area (see more discussion about outsourcing later in this chapter). Homeschooling parents who do recognize their inability to adequately teach their children writing do not always ignore their lack; instead, they often seek techniques others use or alternatives such as outsourcing to address gaps in their knowledge. Another user, The\_HomeScholar, replies with a link to his own website to help with “grading English” and with a link to other online English programs. Such a reply acknowledges the importance of homeschooling parents having resources to inform their writing instruction and to have access to alternatives if they do not feel comfortable with providing instruction themselves. In other words, homeschooling parents who feel inadequate because of their non-specialist status have resources to draw upon as they seek to adequately prepare their students for future writing experiences.

Finally, another thread more directly addresses the issue of grading writing, although it contains only two posts. The initial post by Isikole asks, “What is the best way to grade composition? What have you more experienced Moms found works best for you?” (“Grading English Composition”). Appealing to “more experienced Moms” for advice, Isikole sets herself up as a non-specialist instructor without much experience teaching writing who wants pedagogical assistance. The reply by Rachel161 gives a brief indication of what she does, hits on the importance of writing, and suggests outsourcing writing instruction if needed:

I simply pore through my childrens’ papers and discuss how to better develop an idea or paragraph or whatever else needs work. I think it’s great that you’re concerned because good writing skills are essential for any career. If you ever feel that perhaps you can’t quite offer what your child need, you could always sign her up for some junior college classes in your area. (“Grading English Composition”)

Rachel161’s suggestion that Isikole not take on this work if she feels uncertain acknowledges Isikole’s positioning herself as a non-specialist teaching writing. Her brief suggestion to look at “how to better develop an idea or paragraph” focuses on higher-level concerns, but it does not offer detailed help with identifying ideas or paragraphs that need more development in students’ writing. Instead, Rachel161 reinforces the importance of writing instruction, saying that “good writing skills are essential for any career.” Although this claim is unsupported in this thread, it is a refrain that composition instructors frequently use to reinforce why first-year composition should be taught and that studies such as Deborah Brandt’s study of workplace writing and Dale J. Cohen, Sheida White, and Steffaney B. Cohen’s examination of adults’ writing practices have

shown to be largely true. This assertion turns attention to the preparation students need to receive – here, general “writing skills” – and leads into the claim that homeschooling parents can outsource writing instruction if they don’t feel qualified to provide students with this preparation in writing. As homeschooling parents discuss how to teach writing, they juggle tensions between personal concerns, such as students’ writing abilities, and the imposing presence of future writing expectations. Their status as non-specialist writing instructors makes negotiations of these issues more difficult, and their lack of training can obscure some relevant issues, such as the possibility of students having learning disabilities. Writing pedagogy may seem to be one area where parents possess much control over their students’ writing instruction, but this forum reveals how many concerns parents attempt to account for and their insecurities as writing instructors that complicate their decisions about how to structure and assess their children’s writing.

### *Writing Curricula Recommendations*

More popular on *Homeschool.com* than discussions about writing pedagogies are recommendations concerning writing and language arts curricula. These discussions revolve not only around frequent posts about particular curricula but also around the integration of writing with other subjects, a concern with the individual learning of students, and meeting state and college standards through curricula, a concern with public expectations of writing instruction. Homeschooling parents who participate in these discussions do so as a way to learn about how other parents have negotiated these competing demands, even as curricular decisions are one of the more personal decisions

parents can make. As I indicate in chapter two, choosing curricula is often a social activity for homeschooling parents, which is illustrated by the discussions in this forum. Because so many writing curricula are available to homeschoolers and because of the desire to maintain this counterpublic, the resulting threads and posts usually result in various perspectives about curricula rather than consensus (see chapter two for more information about the writing curricula available). However, the many writing curricula available mean that social interactions about curricula are particularly important as parents struggle to choose curricula that both fit their students' needs and will prepare their students for future writing instruction. Interactions on the forum are ultimately meant to help other homeschoolers make sound curricular decisions with the understanding that opinions are built largely through parents' own experiences.

When recommending writing and English curricula, many users on *Homeschool.com* simply mention titles of books for others to investigate, leaving parents to make their own decisions about how well a specific writing curriculum fits the family or student's needs. One illustrative example responds to a post by the user crouton about what curricula to use to help his or her sixth grade son catch up on math and composition before beginning high school, a question indicative of his or her worries about his or her son's preparation. One respondent, Annie, tells crouton, "For composition, we use a slim book called *Comprehensive Composition* by Kathryn Stout. I like it; it covers all the main types of writing: narrative, persuasive, expository and descriptive. However, it's not too long and is easily implemented" ("Middle School Prep for HS"). These last two sentences briefly explain why Annie uses this text, which is typical for similar posts.

Homeschooling parents offer advice by naming what a text is and why they liked it, but they leave other parents the task of exploring exactly what the text teaches. By offering curricular recommendations based on their own experiences, parents leave open other parents' interpretations of the efficacy of these texts and whether they will work for their students. This is one admission of the importance of curricular "fit" with particular families and students; not all families and students will find specific writing curriculum work for them as it did for others. In another thread started by a homeschooling student asking for help finding curricula for the ninth grade, David14 merely provides a link to HSLDA's guide to high school that has curricular recommendations while isamama recommends "Easy Grammar Plus and/or GUM by ZanerBloser," saying that her daughter "loved GUM because each grammar lesson had an interesting topic to learn instead of made up sentences to work with" ("New to Homeschool Need Help"). Other recommendations from users include those for handwriting, spelling, and grammar curricula such as Sequential Spelling ("Need Advice About Handwriting"), Winston Grammar and All About Spelling ("Middle School Curriculum"), Easy Grammar ("Middle School Curriculum") and Apples Daily spelling drills ("Help!"). Posts about curricula thus often end up with users collectively creating lists of possibilities for parents (and sometimes students) to investigate.

Economic considerations are seen in some threads (see earlier discussion of the thread begun by peaceroots) about writing curricula. In an entire thread about inexpensive curricula, CNBarnes discusses the public library's resources: "the public library is one of the best friends a homeschoolers can have. Virtually everything they



have there (and they have A LOT) is **free**” (“High School”; emphasis original). As seen in this thread, there are acknowledged limitations to the curricula homeschooling parents can buy even as they still negotiate differences between personal pedagogies and social pressures to prepare their children well. Additional factors such as economic considerations complicate even further the curricular decisions parents make as they teach their children to write. Once parents have made general recommendations to the original post, threads do not typically go any further than the user who started the thread sometimes thanking others for recommendations and saying that they will look into the recommended curricula. Of note is the fact that curriculum recommendations, besides the recommendation for *Comprehensive Composition*, revolve much more around literature, grammar, and spelling than around writing. None of the curricula I discuss in chapter two, for example, are mentioned on these forums. Despite some parents’ interest in how to teach and grade writing as seen previously and what to assign in order to conform to state and college standards as seen later in this chapter, writing curricula are not often specifically discussed. A disconnect exists between the myriad of writing curricula available and discussions of these. Homeschooling parents may already know about popular writing curricula and don’t need as much advice about what to use. It may also be the case that many parents don’t purchase writing curricula at all (especially given economic concerns) and, instead, integrate writing instruction into other subjects (see my later discussion of unit studies), which focuses more on what students are interested in learning about than writing *per se*. Furthermore, some homeschooling parents keenly feel their non-specialist instructor status particularly when it comes to writing instruction and

default into not providing explicit writing instruction to their children, such as Cindy Wallis and Cynthia Carroll in Kunzman's study. Concerns about their abilities to teach writing lead some parents away from utilizing writing curricula and toward either ignoring writing instruction or outsourcing it to others who are more comfortable teaching writing.

Just one discussion about specific curricula mentions writing and how a particular curriculum "counts" toward high school credit, a concern with homeschooling children's preparation for college expectations, even if just on a transcript. Kaci asks about *Beautiful Feet* curriculum because she has received conflicting information about whether it can count as literature or English in high school. Elliemaejune responds:

None of the Beautiful Feet Books study guides can be counted as 'literature.' They are all history; they just use good literature instead of textbooks. . . . If you like the way BFB does history, go ahead and use it. But you will need to use something different for English. At the high school level, it is expected that each year of English will include composition *and* literature (and grammar, if needed). ("Beautiful Feet")

The forum moderator explains why BFB cannot fulfill high school English requirements because high school students should receive instruction in both literature and writing. However, kaci is clearly still unsure because she replies, "I just talked with the folks at Beautiful Feet and they assured me that yes, I will get a ½ Literature credith for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. And 2 Literature credits for 11-12<sup>th</sup>. I'm just curious how you arrived at your answer. I mean no dis-respect, I'd really like to know" ("Beautiful Feet"). What kaci fails to understand is Elliemaejune's emphasis on the two aspects of English that high school English typically covers – literature *and* writing, not just literature. Elliemaejune's reply

is confusing because her first sentence claims that Beautiful Feet cannot be used as literature when, instead, it seems clear in the rest of her post that she is pointing to a distinction between literature and writing instruction in high school English classes. Although high school English teachers such as Mosley point out that writing instruction in high school is often married to the literature students read, making it different from some college writing instruction, writing instruction still occurs. Another user, myhsplace, also overlooks this distinction: “Not enough literature??????? hmmm don’t know who told ya that but basically it is a literature based program” (“Beautiful Feet”). The many question marks indicate myhsplace’s disbelief while the “hmmm” mimics a vocal filler and a stalling technique, unnecessary in writing but providing some space for disagreement. Because Elliemaejune never returns to clarify her point, it isn’t certain if either kaci or myhsplace ever receive clarification about literature and writing instruction in high school; they certainly do not on this thread, indicating one of the problems with asynchronous online interactions. This conversation illustrates parents’ concerns with making sure that their children have high school transcripts that look similar to students from traditional schools while also showing how their non-specialist status impedes their decision-making processes at times. Without more guidance, the decisions homeschooling parents make about writing instruction are not always informed and, thus, could be inadequate for students as they transition out of high school.

Doubts that homeschooling parents feel about the instruction they offer can be clearly seen in another thread. Begun by sarahgw, a private school graduate

homeschooling her little sister for one year after her sister was expelled from public school,<sup>129</sup> she outlines the English curriculum she has begun with her:

1<sup>st</sup> week she is reading *Night*, and taking a test on it, she also has an essay, and poem, and a study guide. 2<sup>nd</sup> week she is finishing the book, has a news paper page to create, study guide, test on second half of book, and a narrative poster. 3<sup>rd</sup> week: some more stuff with *Night* and an author brochure (it will be fun!), and a test on all of *Night*. Then we are going to start: I know why the caged bird sings. (“Going To Fast?”)

Sarahgw is primarily concerned with whether this work (and other work in different subjects) is appropriate for her sister or whether it requires too much. Her concerns, therefore, revolve around how much work to assign her sister as she juggles what her sister can do with what she thinks is an amount of work comparable to other schools. Significantly, this plan does include both literature and writing (an essay, a newspaper page, a narrative poster) unlike the *Beautiful Feet* curriculum, indicating Sarahgw’s familiarity with the blending of literature and writing in high school English classes. Elliemaejune replies that “it doesn’t seem so bad” as far as workload goes. Shari Nielsen, another user, advises, “Just make sure you review material you have covered previously here and there. Sometimes when you work at such a fast pace the kids learn things for the test and then forget them . . . Also make sure you provide her with other ways of practicing the material” such as writing her own test questions, making powerpoints, or

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<sup>129</sup> A sibling homeschooling another sibling is an unusual situation. Although siblings often help each other with their work, they are rarely the sole providers of education. Grandparents and even aunts or uncles more commonly assume the teacher role with children if parents aren’t available to homeschool, although statistics about how many do so are unavailable. I have used “parent” throughout this project, despite my acknowledgement that homeschooling teachers are not always the parents of the children they homeschool.

giving lectures about the material (“Going To Fast?”). Shari provides more explanation than ellieaejune of what can happen if material is covered too quickly and how to counteract students’ learning for the test only, a typical problem in high school classes, especially as No Child Left Behind and CCSS have reinforced the predominance of standardized testing in classrooms. Shari cautions sarahgw, in other words, against replicating English instruction in traditional schools so much that problems there enter into home instruction. Sarahgw’s need for other homeschooling parents to endorse the instruction she offers indicates her desire to help her sister academically succeed as well as her insecurities about how to offer the instruction that will allow her to do so, concerns that homeschooling parents often have and seek validation from this counterpublic about.

As homeschooling parents struggle to determine how to teach their children writing and other subjects, especially as they balance competing tensions between what they want to teach and what they think they should teach, many choose a unit study approach to education, learning various subjects through the lenses of one topic. This pedagogy allows parents to develop interests their students have or topics they think their students should learn about through in-depth study that integrates different subjects, including writing. For example, Amanda Bennett has developed popular unit studies for homeschoolers revolving around topics such as American Government, Dogs, Space, Horses, Digital Photography, etc. Some of these topics, such as Dogs, are based in student interests whereas others, such as American Government, examine areas traditionally taught in schools. Her website claims:

These studies are designed so that while the child is learning the basic material, he/she is also reinforcing other academic skills. Reading skills are emphasized with the various books studied. Writing skills are developed through writing assignments, copying and dictation and journal writing. Thinking skills mature through hands-on activities and problem analysis. (“Unit Study Adventures”)

Through different assignments and activities, students learn about one subject while also developing skills that would typically be taught separately. In one thread about what to include in an English curriculum, Lorraine Curry explains this approach: “You can definitely combine these related subjects [literature, reading, writing, composition] and cover many even less-connected subjects by using the basic techniques of reading and reporting” (“Reading, Writing, Literature, Composition”). Although I discuss the initial misinterpretation of state standards and curricula in this thread later in this chapter, Lorraine Curry outlines a unit study approach that integrates many subjects while also focusing on different facets of English, including writing.

Users post about specific ways they have integrated writing and other subjects in different threads. CNBarnes, for example, in a thread previously discussed about homeschooling in high school, talks about the unit study technique used with his daughter:

... my youngest daughter was fascinated by dolphins when she was little. So we started out by checking out a dozen or so books from the library about dolphins (reading). And of course, she learned that dolphins are a sub-type of whales and that there were 2 main types (biology). Then she had to write a letter to her grandparents telling them about the dolphins (writing & spelling). Then she had to mark on a map where the different kinds of dolphins and whales lived (geography). Then she learned about whale fishing and had to figure out how many were killed vs how long it takes them to reproduce (math) (“Preparing to Home School High School”).

Later, CNBarnes notes, “I **LOVE** unit studies” (“Preparing to Home School High School”; emphasis original). The integration of writing with another subject is clear here; it is one way to reinforce this student’s learning about dolphins. Another user, antiques55, in a previously discussed thread talks about how she integrates writing with the poem “Casey at the Bat,” including picking out descriptive sentences and words and writing sentences that incorporate metaphors and similes (“Feeling a Little Overwhelmed”). When homeschoolers teach writing in this way, the focus is not always on writing itself. Writing becomes, instead, a way for students to learn about other subjects that they are already interested in. This approach may not provide students with all the writing instruction they would need (an argument often made to support the need for first-year composition in postsecondary institutions), but it is one way homeschoolers seek to involve students in their schooling while still teaching them the knowledge and skills they presumably need to learn (similar to the ways WAC and CAC programs seek to reinforce writing and communication skills on postsecondary campuses through integration into other subjects).

Even as some of the threads about writing curricula are concerned with how to involve students in their instruction, other threads are concerned with how to align writing instruction with state standards and college expectations. Homeschooling parents don’t identify student-centered instruction and instructional alignment as separate concerns since both relate to the instruction they choose; however, the explicit discussions of these do reveal how the personal and the public constantly influence what writing curricula parents choose to use with their children. In one thread, user Merk asks

about requirements for high school graduation: “I am very new at this homeschooling thing and my sons are all very small right now but I am still very concerned about credits towards highschool graduation, could someone please tell me the ins and outs of it all. I don’t want to be overwhelmed by it” (“How Do You Get Credits”). This initial post, which is very open-ended and clearly a plea for support, receives many responses, including one very long response by user Karen McD about various approaches and her urging for parents to look into state requirements for homeschoolers. Karen McD mentions that she’s heard about using “written research papers for the academic high school courses. I think the formula was – 2000 words per report – 6 reports equaled one credit course. If the student relished writing, this would be a wonderfully simple approach to high school” (“How Do You Get Credits”). This is an approach to high school that I have not found elsewhere in my research and it is one that seems no more (or less) valid than others used by homeschoolers to indicate the completion of courses. An obvious value to this pedagogy is the amount of writing students would do, although such courses would not necessarily involve writing instruction. Eventually, elliemaejune steps in and points out that “most states do NOT have requirements for homeschooled children to ‘graduate’” (“How Do You Get Credits”). She does suggest that if Merk prefers, “you may follow the requirements your state has for its public school students,” including “4 years of English” (“How Do You Get Credits”). The replies to Merk indicate a concurrent laid-back approach to credit accumulation and concern with student preparation for high school and college expectations. Such approaches are often juggled, as has been seen throughout this project, as homeschoolers make decisions about the



writing instruction they will offer their children. After discussion, parents have to determine how much they are individually concerned with these issues and how much they will influence what they assign and teach.

As ellimaejune points out and as I've discussed in chapter one, homeschooling regulations vary by state, which makes discussions on national forums about homeschooling regulations difficult because what is true for parents in one state may not be true for parents in another. On one thread I've previously discussed, a new homeschooler, me&mine, posts about state homeschooling requirements in South Carolina:

We are just starting hs [homeschool] (in planning stage). Our state (SC) requires reading, writing, math, science, social studies, and in 7-12 composition and literature. Wouldn't we be able to cover all 4 'language arts' with one or two courses rather than 4 seperate ones? My dd [dear daughter] is an excellent reader, but I'd like to work on her vocab and grammer too. Any suggestions? ("Reading, Writing, Literature, Composition")

It is clear that his or her confusion here, spurred by the confusing way SC lists its homeschooling requirements, is the result of a lack of understanding of English curriculum in schools. Other users try to explain this misunderstanding. Cat05 asks:

What is the difference between writing and composition, and reading and literature? It all sounds like one class to me. You read something and then write an essay on it. You do a lesson on metaphors, read 3 poems, and write an essay on the use of metaphor in the poems. Lessons on grammar and new vocabulary words fit in there too. ("Reading, Writing, Literature, Composition")

This user doesn't use the language of state standards or clearly explain why these would all fit into the same course, but he or she does explain how these should be integrated into one course rather than being seen as many courses.

Later in the thread, Elliemaejune also steps in to clarify with a rather long post about language arts and English courses in high school:

“Language arts” (a term which I abhor, because no one really knows what it means, lol) are included under the general term of “English.” Formal textbook publishers include grammar and composition in their English texts/workbooks, with reading or literature in a separate book/text/workbook. Each year of English should include grammar, composition, and literature (or reading; often it's “reading” until 8<sup>th</sup> grade, “literature” after that), with 1 grade being given for English. (Vocabulary would be included in that one grade, as well.) IOW [in other words], they are \*NOT\* separate courses. (“Reading, Writing, Literature, Composition”)

Elliemaejune ends this post with an explanation of how various curricula would fit into one English grade. Her clarification is similar to Cat05's, but as a more knowledgeable user, she directly addresses what each year of English should include, explaining how terms me&mine uses in his or her original post fit into this one course. These threads convey some confusion on the part of homeschoolers about what writing requirements homeschooled students in their states have, particularly in relation to students in traditional schools. Parents on these threads also betray an interest in how to “count” credits or work completed toward high school. Such concerns, for them, are largely about making certain that their state's Department of Education or college admissions offices understand the work their students did and how this relates to the work other students do. However, it also plays into the growing emphasis in public schools and postsecondary

institutions on Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and concurrent enrollment classes, which are concerned only with the quantity of work completed to check off requirements rather than the venue or content of this work.<sup>130</sup> Requirements, by both homeschooling parents and by students who take AP, IB, or concurrent enrollment classes, are seen as a social burden rather than as socially-agreed aspects of education that everyone should attain.

Of larger concern for most homeschoolers than alignment of writing curricula with state standards is alignment of their writing instruction with college expectations. Even writing curricula themselves, as seen in chapter two, sometimes explicitly refer to how well they prepare homeschooled students for college writing. In a thread begun by crouton previously discussed, crouton asks about requirements for high school. Elliemaejune replies, “Most states do not have requirements for ‘high school.’ Your goal is to help your dc [dear children]<sup>131</sup> be prepared to be productive, responsible adults. If college is in their future, you will want to find out what prospective colleges want to see from homeschooled applicants” (“Middle School Prep for HS”). This echoes her discussion of language arts with Cat05, in which she claims that states don’t have

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<sup>130</sup> See *College Credit for Writing in High School* by Kristine Hansen and Christine R. Farris for in-depth discussions of the movement of first-year college writing courses into programs that students can complete while in high school.

<sup>131</sup> The abbreviations dc (dear child or dear children), dd (dear daughter), and ds (dear son) are used throughout this forum. These emphasize the parent-child relationship rather than the teacher-student relationship that homeschooling parents have with their children and serve as a reminder, even if unintended, to those on the forum that discussions are not just about students but about children whose lives will be changed because of decisions that parents make. The “dear” may seem unintentionally sarcastic, but it reinforces the preciousness of children and the importance of the schooling that parents provide.

particular guidelines for high school students. She turns attention, instead, to college admissions expectations. Crouton responds:

I'm going to have to disagree with you ella mae :) While most states don't necessarily have any requirements for homeschooling high school, colleges do have requirements. In order to do high school work then some preparations do have to be made by 8<sup>th</sup> grade, such as pre-algebra classes for math and being able to write a competent essay . . . some progress needs to be made in weak areas of my son's education if he is to go to college. ("Middle School Prep for HS")

In this reply, crouton seemingly overlooks elliemaejune's attention to college requirements. He or she overlooks elliemaejune's advice to consider specific college admission requirements for required high school coursework. Instead, crouton mentions specific classes and skills – pre-algebra and writing a “competent essay” – to direct attention to his or her desire for specific information. Elliemaejune attempts to tell crouton that requirements for college are not the same at all postsecondary institutions, but this open-ended approach to thinking about college expectations does not fit crouton's need for specific recommendations about how to help his or her high school student prepare for college.

Crouton's question is not simply a matter of requirements or curricula but, instead, a crucial point at which decisions will be made that affect his or her son's entire future. Since crouton does not possess a strong understanding of what college expectations will be, he or she wants specific recommendations rather than the suggestion that he or she must construct those for his or her son based on specific colleges. In other words, crouton does not want to have to imaginatively construct what college work will look like; he or she wants others, purportedly with more experience, to offer specific

advice about what this work will be and what high school work will appropriately prepare his or her son. Homeschooling parents who try to determine what college expectations are or will be do not always find the help they are looking for from other parents, leaving them to make these determinations on their own. This can be a tricky process if they are unfamiliar with what college work will be like and how they can prepare their students for college-level classes.

Several other threads address college expectations. In a thread began by Merk about high school credits previously discussed, *elliemaejune* gives similar advice: “If your dc is college-bound, you should contact the college(s) he’s interested in and find out what they require from \*homeschooled\* applicants, then plan your high school course of study from there” (“How Do You Get Credits”). Part of *elliemaejune*’s work in this thread is telling Merk and other readers that many postsecondary institutions are familiar with working with homeschooled students, comforting any fears they may have about their children being admitted to college based on their homeschooling. Many postsecondary institutions are growing more familiar with homeschooled applicants, as evidenced in discussions by admissions officers.<sup>132</sup> However, postsecondary institutions still have to develop ways to assess work that homeschooled students complete. Sometimes these can seem idiosyncratic to homeschooling parents. *The\_HomeScholar* says in a thread about transcripts:

The problem is that all the colleges are different, and they will all ask for different things. Many colleges really do ask for course descriptions. We didn’t apply to those fancy ‘selective’ colleges, just regular ones. The colleges still asked us for

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<sup>132</sup> See Ray, “Homeschoolers on to College”; Blair; and Jones and Gloeckner.

some strange things. One wanted a ‘graded English paper’ and another wanted a sample of a lab write-up. You never really know WHAT a college will want, you have to check with each one. So I followed the boy scout motto, and tried to always be prepared :-) (“Keeping Record”)

The\_HomeScholar points out that his children did not attend “fancy ‘selective’ colleges” to help homeschooling parents envision the types of postsecondary institutions his children applied to (although it isn’t completely clear if they were applying to four-year state institutions, private institutions, or community colleges). Providing this baseline knowledge, he indicates that the materials requested by colleges, while unusual, are the types of demands that should be expected from postsecondary institutions.

Another user, CNBarnes, is much more hostile about college admission requirements for homeschooled students: “If they [the admissions officers] can’t figure out what a course is from the name – perhaps THEY should go to school. . . . A hazard of working for a major university is that I see first hand just how idiotic Phd’s who run these things can be. . . . Ranting at the college admins – not you. :-)” (“Keeping Record”). CNBarnes is very hostile towards those who make determinations about who will be admitted to college, projecting some anxiety about these decisions being left to particular people who he does not respect. Those more familiar with college admission and administration recognize the problem with his statement: course titles do not describe what courses cover, particularly English and writing courses (as is obvious from discussions on other threads concerning curricula). However, homeschooling parents’ lack of understanding about postsecondary education is evidenced here by CNBarnes. Threads that discuss curricula and college expectations display different attitudes –

including relaxed, open, confused, and adverse – about homeschooling parents’ anticipation of postsecondary expectations. For many homeschoolers on this forum who are unfamiliar with college-level writing, college is a looming presence that creates anxiety about how to help students learn writing skills that will “count” on high school transcripts and prepare them for college writing.

### *Outsourcing Writing Instruction*

Writing instruction is one particular area that homeschooling parents as non-specialist writing instructors often have difficulty teaching. When parents struggle, they sometimes turn to courses their students can take outside of the home or online with other teachers in order to fill the need for their students’ writing instruction. I call this “outsourcing” writing instruction. Even though parents are placing children in what may be seen as typical classrooms, they are moving writing instruction from the home, the space in which their students typically learn, to these classrooms much as outsourcing work involves removing that work to another space. The difference here is that parents, unlike companies typically looking for cheaper labor above all else, struggle over their decision to outsource because they have conflicting feelings about the control they should retain as parent-teachers and the preparation they can offer their children. Parents typically make the decision to outsource writing instruction based, at least in part, on the pressure for their children to be prepared for college writing experiences and their own doubts about their abilities to teach writing adequately without further training.

Homeschooling parents don't have to outsource; they can teach their children to write as best as they can and wait for future teachers, presumably in college, to help their children. Abby Carroll, a high school homeschooled student in Kunzman's study, began taking community college courses with her sister, Leah. She says they had to take a placement test about which she admits, "My writing wasn't real good. My writing is – ugh" (148). Her mother, Cynthia, admits that writing instruction has been neglected in their home, adding that they are going to use Institute for Excellence in Writing with their son Joshua to overcome the lack of attention to writing instruction in their home (Kunzman 159). Often, however, if homeschooling parents feel unqualified to teach writing then they turn to others to help with writing instruction rather than attempting to fill this deficit on their own. In addition to co-op courses as I discussed in the previous chapter, homeschoolers also look to online or correspondence courses or dual enrollment courses in community colleges as ways to outsource writing instruction. When homeschoolers discuss these options on *Homeschool.com* forums, they make suggestions about finding alternatives to home writing instruction. Because there are many local options such as co-ops for outsourcing writing instruction, these are not always specific discussions of particular options as they are general ideas about outsourcing writing instruction. However, there are still moments when conversations about outsourcing writing instruction evolve into tense discussions about control over children's education when homeschoolers begin sending them out of the home. Outsourcing writing instruction is a fraught decision, particularly if students dual enroll in writing courses, because it pinpoints fears homeschooling parents have about not being able to teach their



children at home. When they are forced to recognize that their non-specialist status as writing instructors and lack of training can be detrimental to their children, the entire enterprise of homeschooling is at question. Many homeschooling parents confront this issue by returning again to the value of children gaining their overall education in the home, even if some, or all, of the instruction and curriculum is best offloaded to experienced instructors. In other words, homeschooling parents still value the familial ties and control over schooling environment that they exercise even if their children take one class or even all of their classes with another instructor, which turns attention to the many facets of education that don't simply involve instruction. As non-specialists, homeschooling parents still offer a supportive learning environment that they believe is important for children's education, regardless of who plans, teaches, or grades writing.

As discussed in chapter three, outsourcing some education to co-ops is a popular supplementation of home education. However, given the local nature of availability of co-ops, courses taught, and instructors, co-op courses are very infrequently mentioned on *Homeschool.com* forums. Only twice in my research do users mention this option. Once, in a post responding to a query from user toynah about inexpensive online high school, the user HistoryMom outlines "items that I think she [her daughter in eighth grade] will do better with an outside source" ("High School"). These include "some local writing classes" along with German and a science lab ("High School"). She points out that toynah is asking for a curriculum that doesn't exist because toynah is looking "for an online high school that is accredited and provides a hs [high school] diploma for under \$1,000 for grades 9-12 all together" ("High School"). Therefore, HistoryMom uses her

answer to illustrate how much she spends for one year of schooling that includes outside resources, which is about \$1,000. In HistoryMom's case, writing is one of the subjects that she has identified as specialized and difficult enough to teach at home that outsourcing is necessary. In another post begun by peaceroots about course credits in high school, peaceroots tells others users that his or her son is taking speech, Spanish, and business at a co-op ("Schedule for High School"). A reply from The\_HomeScholar does not acknowledge these courses, perhaps because it is not completely pertinent to peaceroots's original question but also because it is difficult to discuss co-op courses that are typically unique to the co-op and instructor. The value of these courses is not reinforced on these forums, in part because this would be extremely difficult. Instead, users mention these as options they are using to help their children learn subjects that they aren't comfortable teaching themselves as non-specialist instructors and, therefore, as subjects that they are willing to give up control over.

Other forms of outsourcing such as online programs and community college courses are discussed more frequently and with greater depth, particularly since homeschoolers from different geographical areas can use the same or similar resources. Online courses are one of the most popular ways that some homeschoolers outsource English and writing instruction. Homeschooling parents often discuss particular programs on *Homeschool.com* to share experiences in these programs with one another. One popular option for online courses is The Keystone School. This program provides online courses, either to supplement homeschooling or traditional education or as a complete packaged curriculum that requires no other schooling by parents. In a thread begun by

crouton about his or her son's progress, particularly in math and composition, crouton adds, "We're also considering a correspondence school for high school, Keystone is one, like many others here are also considering. However I feel like I want to be more involved in his high school lessons. I don't want to just hand him off to a program and stand aside, but I feel overwhelmed when thinking about high school requirements" ("Middle School Prep for HS"). Crouton's post reveals some anxiety about what will be best for his or her son and how involved he or she will be able to be in his or her son's schooling if he does attend The Keystone School. Crouton says that enrolling his or her son in this program would feel like handing him off and stepping aside, which is exactly what homeschooling parents want to avoid when they decide to homeschool their children. When high school approaches, as it does for crouton's son, parents have a more difficult time reconciling the desire to homeschool with the need to prepare their children for college or simply provide them with a solid high school education. Each homeschooling family has to determine on their own how to negotiate these personal and public tensions, choosing to continue education at home or outsourcing some or all of their children's classes.

The Keystone School is just one of many programs available to supplement or replace parent-controlled curriculum. Another popular program is American School, which offers both correspondence and online courses and provides textbooks to those who enroll in its courses. One thread is completely dedicated to a discussion of American School curriculum, indicating its popularity for outsourcing instruction. Chessie15, who writes the original post, says that she ordered the curriculum for her daughter but that she

will review it before deciding to keep it. Her reason for turning to American School is similar to crouton's concerns: "I felt this would keep us more on track with the studies for highschool" ("American School"). Like crouton, chessie15 is concerned with high school level instruction and making sure her daughter is prepared for whatever life post-high school brings. She posts again when she receives two of the books for psychology and writing, adding, "I have spent most of the evening looking over the material and reading the literature. So far I like what I see, the books are laid out very nice and there are instructions for everything" ("American School"). Her post indicates the self-directed nature of learning through the American School with "instructions" being of paramount importance because they are one of the ways that students will receive direct instruction. GraftedBranch, another user, claims that she used American School to finish her high school diploma and that "The courses were very good, and instructors were very helpful" ("American School"). Her post affirms chessie15's assessment of the curriculum while also adding that instructors are available to assist students when needed. The availability of trained instructors is very important since one of the reasons parents would surrender control over their children's schooling is with the assumption that instruction would better prepare their children for high school and college expectations. If American School only provided curriculum, it would only remove the burden of curricular development from parents. This is an important aspect of their concerns with their children's preparation but it is certainly not their only concern.

Another user, bennifer, jumps into the conversation with several questions about how American School operates, such as how exams are completed and options for choice

within the curriculum, which chessie15 answers. Later, bennifer says that her biggest concern is “Giving up the freedom to pick and choose which curriculum we like best and what works for MY son” (“American School”). She briefly talks about her attempt to use another online program, SeaScape Private School, with her son the year before that only lasted one month because “The books were forever old and I hated not being able to choose what he liked best” (“American School”). Bennifer’s concerns, therefore, are about control over instruction and how homeschooling is intended to make education personally meaningful for students, which can be offset if too much attention is turned to schooling expectations found in traditional schools. Writing and other subjects for bennifer are more about what her son wants to learn than what others say he should learn. Unlike some other homeschooling parents who are primarily concerned with their students’ preparation for more advanced instruction, bennifer’s main worry is with her son’s personal connection to school rather than his meeting certain standards. Chessie15 ends the thread by saying that she decided to return the American School books because she only received two at a time (with two subjects to be completed at a time and then sent back in exchange for two new books), and she wanted to be able to use the American School books throughout the school year at her daughter’s own pace. Although she seems pleased with the curriculum, her ability to choose the way in which subjects were covered is diminished because of the delivery system American School uses, another issue with control over instruction. For both chessie15 and bennifer, their hesitations about

American School revolve around problems of choice both of what is covered and how this work can be completed.<sup>133</sup>

Others on *Homeschool.com* don't have such negative views of American School, indicating that outsourcing writing instruction is embraced by some parents who believe the benefits of providing students with adequate preparation for future writing situations outweighs concerns about control over instruction. David14, a user who is a high school student himself, begins a thread about American School, which he will be using to take online courses in English and several other subjects. He asks, "Could a few members here give me some input of their experiences with AS and point me in the right direction?" ("American School?"). David14 frames this thread as an exploration of American School and people's experiences in it. Another student, csaylor07, responds, "I'm taking the General High School course through American School. If you have any questions, you can ask me" ("American School?"). This response shows that other people are using this program, but csaylor07 does not recount any of his or her experiences with this program. Oregonsun, another user, steps in to prod csaylor07 to discuss these on the thread: "csaylor, do you like this program? I am considering it for my son for high school. Do they only send you one course at a time?" ("American School?"). Csaylor07 responds with a longer discussion of his or her experiences, answering oregonsun's question and adding, "And yes, I love this High School program, it's supposed to be one of the best in the country. Any more ?'s, just ask" ("American School?"). One of the most important

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<sup>133</sup> These dual concerns with what is learned and how are potentially the issues driving other movements against traditional public education, including private schools and the growing charter school movement.

aspects of this discussion is that csaylor07 acknowledges both her own praises for this program as well as its endorsement by others, saying, “it’s supposed to be one of the best in the country.” These informal validations of the curriculum are meant to reassure others such as David15 and oregonsun that the program is both enjoyable (“I love this High School program”) and academically stringent, most homeschooling parents’ main concerns with high school instruction generally but outsourced instruction specifically.

Further supporting the program, csaylor07 adds information about how American School is accredited and by whom, claiming, “Basically what this means, he [oregonsun’s son] wont have any problem getting into College” (“American School?”). He or she explicitly confirms the underlying assumption behind many of the posts about outsourcing writing instruction: parents who consider outsourcing are primarily concerned with their children’s transitions to college-level work. An anonymous guest user questions the validity of csaylor07’s claim, pointing other parents to various factors that can affect whether students are accepted into postsecondary institutions or not:

I would be careful expecting that there’s not going to be any problems getting into college. I’ve known a lot of people who did American School and our kids did a similar school. Colleges really look a lot at SAT scores. . . . When my daughter applied for the university, they didn’t accept her because she didn’t have all the courses they required. (“American School?”)

This user steps in to complicate csaylor07’s claims that someone who complete American School’s program “wont have any problem getting into College,” rightfully explaining that SAT scores matter a lot to colleges and that the courses taken in high school have to meet a college’s requirements for admission. By providing this information, this user

cautions homeschooling parents against the assumption that any program, whether developed on their own or provided by a school, can guarantee their children will be admitted to certain postsecondary institutions. Clearly, homeschooling parents have many questions and concerns about using online programs to meet their children's high school education needs, especially because they are concerned with outsourcing instruction to help their children meet college admissions criteria that they are largely unfamiliar with.

Discussions indicate a wide variety of options homeschooling parents have to outsource instruction to particular programs, including the Keystone School and American School. AtlantaMom writes:

My son is 14, and has struggled academically. I'm more confident with a very laid out plan...and I prefer accredited . . . American HS looks very good. It's been around forever (which gives me some comfort)....and I've pretty much decided on that. HOWEVER, I've heard good things about Keystone now. I can't be overwhelmed with too many options. I don't want to commit for more than a year at a time, so any program that wants a 4-year commitment won't work for me. Any suggestions? Success stories? Good experiences with American or Keystone? ("Favorite On-Line Curriculum")

She adds in the next post, "it doesn't have to be just between those two curriculums. Anything similar that is relatively easy to follow for both my son and myself would be great" ("Favorite On-Line Curriculum"). Unlike other posts that indicate homeschooling parents or even students look to programs to provide a suitable and academically appropriate high school curriculum, AtlantaMom turns to outsourcing because her son "has struggled academically." As a non-specialist instructor, AtlantaMom seeks out a structured curriculum that will help her keep him on track and push him to complete his work. Her questions – asking for "success stories" and "Good experiences" – lead other



users to share positive experiences in programs rather than negative ones. Another user, daroyalle4, replies that her sons use Charity Christian Academy, an online program that she and her family “love” because their sons have been doing well and seem motivated to complete their work (“Favorite On-Line Curriculum”).

DonnaW, another user, indicates that they have used Malibu Cove High School<sup>134</sup> “and really enjoy their programs” (“Favorite On-Line Curriculum”). She tells others, “My son has an assigned teacher that he emails with questions, and his program was customized to his future goal of becoming a Biologist” (“Favorite On-Line Curriculum”). With this program, homeschooling parents’ fears of instruction becoming too standardized are partially allayed since the curriculum can be “customized” to students’ goals (although, admittedly, these can change). However, it is clear that many aspects of her son’s education, such as what he learns, are out of her hands. MechelleMarie interjects that her daughter is taking English (world literature) through Keystone because a public school sponsor recommended taking it.<sup>135</sup> She tells others that there “is one research paper and everything else is graded online” (“Favorite On-Line Curriculum”). Although this post is not critiqued, an English course involving only one essay does not speak well to its inclusion of writing in this curriculum. The programs that homeschooling parents turn to in order to help their children meet standards of writing that will prepare their children for college do not necessarily provide that level of

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<sup>134</sup> This is a high school linked to SeaScape Private School mentioned earlier in this chapter.

<sup>135</sup> It isn’t clear from her post how this sponsorship operates. Her daughter is taking two courses at a public high school and the others online. Participation in the dual enrollment program at the public high school seems to involve being assigned a sponsor teacher who helps homeschoolers plan the rest of their curriculum (“Favorite On-Line Curriculum”).

instruction. Although this may not be a problem while students are in these programs, as parents negotiate how much control to give up to trained writing instructors, they need to consider further the guest user in another thread who advises parents to not assume any program will guarantee their children's admittance into college. No matter which ways parents choose to outsource writing instruction, there are no promises that doing so will ultimately prepare their children for college writing experiences. They have to weigh this risk against the instruction that they as non-specialists can provide their children at home, determining which form of instruction will best suit their own views about education and their children's needs, often based on their incomplete ideas about college-level writing instruction.<sup>136</sup>

Debates about whether or not to outsource instruction and the consequences of these moves are even more fraught in discussions of homeschoolers taking dual enrollment courses or early college at postsecondary institutions. When outsourcing forces students into school environments, particularly state-run school environments such as community colleges, parents often become anxious that their children will encounter learning environments that they wanted their children to avoid when they chose to homeschool them. Here, I focus on one thread about this subject that discusses several perspectives on this particular form of outsourcing, although there are other threads that mention this option.<sup>137</sup> Begun with a post by sapphire68, this thread opens with a typical

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<sup>136</sup> Several other online programs are mentioned in threads but not discussed in detail. These include the Florida Virtual School, a cybercharter, and Write@Home online courses).

<sup>137</sup> Other threads mention homeschooled students taking dual enrollment courses, commenting in particular about the economic benefits and students' adjustments to

move on *Homeschool.com* forums by stating an option sapphire68 is considering and asking for others to share their experiences: “The comm college in our town offers early college beginning in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. We are thinking of this for our middle schooler as he will start high school in a couple of years. I’d love to hear from others that have children who have done this type of thing?” (“Early College?”). Sapphire68 does not offer much information about this early college program, seeking more general advice about parents’ experiences enrolling their children in similar programs. When answers are not immediately provided, another user, emina\_13, states that he or she is a ninth grader and wants to “try that ‘early college’” (“Early College?”), asking again for people to respond to this thread.

A variety of responses are posted about other users’ experiences with their children taking early college or dual enrollment courses while in high school. A few of these are parents’ discussions of positive experiences. HistoryMom, for example, extensively discusses her son’s enrollment in community college courses, including a first-year writing course:

From hearing comments of high school moms in other places, I think that it depends greatly on YOUR community college as well as your student and their post-highschool plans. We have access to two systems and deliberately chose the smaller, more homeschool friendly one. My 18 year old son has had very positive experiences (he started dual enrollment at 17). This term he is taking Expository Writing in an evening class. Many of the other students are adults. We have had no social type issues. The teachers are good and generally have positive attitudes towards the homeschooled students.” (“Early College?”)

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school as some reasons for this option in addition to outsourcing particular subjects, such as writing, to knowledgeable teachers.

HistoryMom does first include the caveat that the particular community college can determine what kind of experience homeschoolers have sending their children to early college or dual enrollment programs. Nevertheless, she emphasizes the positive aspects of her son's education in a dual enrollment program, mentioning a first-year writing course as one that he is currently taking as one example of the kinds of courses available to him and the good attitudes towards him that other students and teachers have exhibited. Because homeschooled students can typically only enroll in one or two classes at a time due to dual enrollment limits, they have to carefully consider what courses are open to them and what courses they want to enroll their children in. HistoryMom does not linger over what classes her son has taken, although his enrollment in a first-year writing course emphasizes her prioritization of it as a class she wanted to outsource. Writing, in other words, is a class she wanted her son to receive instruction in that she herself could not provide.

Other users are more cautious about enrolling homeschooled students in dual enrollment programs. CNBarnes writes,

All 3 of mine did dual-enrollment at our local community college – but they all waited until their senior year of (home)school. There are 2 things to consider when deciding WHEN (not if) to begin: (1) how will they handle it academically? (2) how will they handle it socially (keeping in mind that their classmates are going to be older than they are)? Only you can answer these questions for your child. (“Early College?”)

Despite CNBarnes' hesitation about early college, he admits that his children all attended dual enrollment courses and he emphasizes that homeschooled children should go.

Although he doesn't explain his “WHEN (not if)” comment further, he clearly identifies

some aspects of the dual enrollment program as necessary educational experiences for homeschooled students. These could include instruction such as the writing instruction HistoryMom's son is taking or socialization aspects such as students' acclimation to classroom situations. Rather than generalize what is best for all homeschooled students, CNBarnes tries to ask questions that will help homeschooling parents make the best decisions about dual enrollment for their own children.

The\_HomeScholar posts a more negative answer, directing others to look into college level courses through distance learning because he thought there were "some really detrimental aspects. I could tell you stories that would curl your hair!" ("Early College?"). Like many homeschooling parents, The\_HomeScholar is concerned with the school environment children encounter in community colleges and encourages parents to take advantage of trained teachers through distance education such as the Keystone School and American School. However, he does not tell particular stories about what his children experienced, so it is not clear to other parents what he considers hair-raising stories. For those interested in reading about these experiences, he directs other users to his blog. He also directs others to a webpage about homeschooling college if they are interested in this option. The\_HomeScholar takes a more extreme view of homeschooling and education in schools, arguing not that students should prepare for college but, instead, that they should remain in the home throughout their entire educational careers. Gaining college degrees through online or distance education courses is increasingly popular, although most people choose these programs for convenience or economic reasons. Notably, the attractiveness of these programs may encourage more

homeschooled children to remain at home while they gain their college degrees for different reasons guided by what they are already familiar with (education at home), but more research is needed to consider how homeschoolers approach this option.

Users on the dual enrollment thread give various reasons that they have sent or are considering sending their children to early college or dual enrollment programs. One of these, echoed by other parents whose children attend dual credit courses as Hansen and Farris discuss, is that students are able to earn college credit while in high school. Elliemaejune says both her daughters began taking community college courses when they were 14, “So we did college instead of high school” (“Early College?”). The original user, sapphire68, responds later in the thread to add that his or her son “wants to go to this particular comm college for college courses once he graduates from high school so I thought it would be a great way to get a head start” because he would get “1 whole year of college credits if he goes the CC route during high school” (“Early College?”). Such views echo those of non-homeschooling parents whose children take dual credit or dual enrollment courses, as Kristine Hansen argues in “The Composition Marketplace”:

AP [Advanced Placement], IB [International Baccalaureate], and CE [concurrent enrollment] programs are aimed squarely at those who want to get ahead because they offer students the promise of starting and therefore finishing college early, distinguishing themselves from the common herd, and enhancing their chances of being admitted to a good university, where they will get even further ahead. (3)

Hansen is critical of the emphasis on social mobility that drives parents and students to such programs, but she recognizes that they offer the promise of certain benefits, including finishing college early and being prepared for college. Homeschooling parents

and students are drawn to such programs for these reasons just as other parents and students are.

Another reason parents claim early college and dual enrollment programs can be valuable is that they help homeschooling students adjust to life in a school. This is a reason unique to homeschooling parents; other students who take dual enrollment or dual credit courses are already familiar with a typical schooling environment and don't need this type of contact with classrooms. CNBarnes says in reply to The\_HomeScholar's post about distance learning for college credit:

Going to a college campus was one of the HUGE 'positives' in the reasons we had all 3 of ours do it. Not for the socialization aspect . . . but for the 'this is how you take a class with 150 other people.' And since that is the frequent environment they'll see when they go to the full blown university, we felt that kind of exposure (when it's cheap) was really important. ("Early College?")

CNBarnes points out that homeschooled children may have a difficult time adjusting from schooling at home either by themselves or with a few siblings to taking courses with many other people, although his assumption that courses at a "full blown university" are this large depends, of course, on the institution. Dual enrollment can serve as an important transition for homeschooled parents and students because children are still primarily schooled at home but are also learning particular subjects in classroom environments with other teachers and classmates.

The\_HomeScholar does include the caveat that this experience is only valuable if it is "cheap," emphasizing the economic payoff of early college or dual enrollment experiences that other parents recognize. Douglas Hesse points out that many parties –

including parents – are motivated by the cost efficiency of students taking college-level writing in high school (290) since parents do not typically pay anything or pay very little for their students to take dual enrollment courses.<sup>138</sup> Sapphire68 also recognizes the economic benefits of these programs, adding in the penultimate post in the thread: “you can’t beat that it’s free tuition” (“Early College?”). As can be seen in several of the threads on *Homeschool.com* about various issues, homeschooling parents are often concerned with the cost of education. As the most recent U.S. Department of Education homeschooling report from 2007 illustrates, homeschooling parents are often working or middle class; only 33.2% of homeschoolers have a household income over \$75,000 a year. Their educational decisions, therefore, often involve economic considerations. The opportunity to outsource some instruction while also inexpensively gaining college credit compels many homeschoolers to send their children to early college or dual enrollment programs.<sup>139</sup>

Discussions of dual enrollment programs often involve considering whether high school students are prepared to complete college-level work. Chris M. Anson argues in “Absentee Landlords or Owner-Tenants?” that although the issue of whether “high school are students are intellectually, experientially, and emotionally ready to do college-level work” is an underlying tension of dual enrollment programs, the ship has sailed

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<sup>138</sup> Chris M. Anson correctly argues that someone ultimately must pay for dual enrollment programs (the state education agency, the school district, or the postsecondary institution), even if parents do not.

<sup>139</sup> Another option infrequently mentioned (and only posted about once in these *Homeschool.com* forums) is the opportunity to take CLEP and DSST tests for college credit. AGirlWithWings suggests this is “a fantastically affordable way that’s just perfect for homeschoolers” (“In Need of Change...”) to gain college credit.



because these programs are happening in full force. In discussions of dual enrollment courses, homeschooling parents do not discuss the possible benefits of students remaining in high school courses rather than jumping ahead to college courses except to voice concerns about the difficulty of courses or possible drawbacks to students entering these spaces that are outside of parents' control. This may largely be because homeschooling parents do not often delineate their students' progress in terms of grades or levels of schooling, except to speak to how their students' work aligns with the grade levels of traditionally schooled students. They are more concerned with their students' individual progress than when their age or grade says they should learn something. Because of this model, *when* students begin to take college-level courses is less of a concern for them than if their students are prepared for the work these courses ask of them. This concern can be seen in a post by chessie15 in the thread I have discussed about early college: "I have a few people that I work with they children attend [early college in NC] and they say it is definately a challange for children who are not use to advance classes" ("Early College?"). The popularity of early college and dual enrollment courses with homeschoolers may be one reason for the lack of conflict in conversations about these programs. Despite The\_HomeScholar and CNBarnes's disagreement about whether homeschooled students should participate in these programs, most threads that contain posts about these programs maintain a friendly and informational tone. Such open discussion suggests that homeschoolers may be more open to outsourcing instruction, including writing instruction, to early college and dual enrollment programs than online high school programs because there are unique benefits to students taking these courses

(such as college credit, experience in classrooms, and economic relief from future college expenses as I have already discussed). Although statistics about the number of homeschooled students who participate in such programs is unavailable, the frequency with which it is mentioned on *Homeschool.com* forums and other homeschooling websites speaks to the popularity of this option for outsourcing writing instruction.

### **Online Identities of Homeschool Parents as Writing Teachers**

As can be seen in these threads, writing is a subject that homeschooling parents are not entirely comfortable teaching, especially because their status as non-specialist writing instructors means that they are largely unaware of specific pedagogical techniques and high school standards for English courses. Some parents are generally uncomfortable with homeschooling in high school, particularly given the seemingly higher stakes of adequately preparing students for college, but others focus on writing specifically as a difficult subject to teach. In working through these posts, neither a thick description of homeschoolers, such as would be found in ethnographies, nor a close analysis of language, such as would be found in discourse analysis, is formed. Instead, I have sought to answer Chiseri-Strater's question "What goes on here?" by analyzing the conversations homeschooling parents have on *Homeschool.com*. Doing so allows me to focus on the ways that homeschooling parents use these forums to discuss writing instruction as part of their construction of a counterpublic that builds and supports alternative views about education.

The struggles of homeschooling parents to teach writing can also be seen elsewhere. Cynthia Carroll, a homeschooling mother, claims,

My biggest weakness is probably language arts, writing stuff and all that. And that's probably the area where I don't push the kids enough. But I learned to write in college. I had some great writing classes and great teachers. So I guess I'm kind of falling back on that: when it's time to do in-depth research projects sorta things, they can tackle it at the college level. They've got the basic skills of how to put it together. (Kunzman 138)

Her tactic for dealing with writing is to push instruction onto postsecondary writing teachers once she has taught children “basic skills” of how to structure writing. Such an approach does not recognize that writing and research skills take much longer to learn than one or two required composition courses in college as scholars such as Sternglass and Herrington and Curtis claim. Just because Carroll's experiences were adequate does not mean her children's will be. Kunzman comments on this gap in instruction:

As a former high school English teacher, I'm concerned by their [the Carroll's] lack of attention to writing. But I also have to admit that plenty of public school students get relatively little practice in extended analytical writing – long essays, research papers, and the like – so this is hardly a flaw intrinsic to homeschooling. But it strikes me that this could in fact be a great strength in homeschooling, for parents committed to putting in the extra time to read and critique their children's writing. It's hard for a tenth-grade English teachers to assign and evaluate 150 essays a week – but an extra half hour for a homeschool parent to read an analysis of Orwell's *Animal Farm* or a research paper on current events seems both manageable and tremendously valuable. (138-139)

His point is that while homeschooled students may not suffer more than students in traditional schools, writing could be a strength of homeschooling given the much smaller number of students homeschooling parents have to work with if they would take the time

to assign and give feedback on written work. What he does not acknowledge, however, is that many homeschooling parents feel unprepared to teach writing, as evidenced by these conversations. Parents' attempts to manage their lack of expertise about writing lead them to these discussions and to alternatives to home instruction through outsourcing.

Homeschooling parents' discussions on these forums illustrate the importance of interactions about writing instruction, particularly for non-specialist writing teachers. Without this community, parents would be left to make decisions about pedagogies on their own, which would be difficult given their lack of expertise in writing instruction. As parents in this counterpublic form connections with one another through identification processes, especially as they recognize their dual roles of parents and teachers and negotiate these identities collectively, they share advice about writing instruction and construct ideas of what postsecondary institutions want high school students to learn. Often, these conversations lead to conflicting advice or disagreement, illustrating how difficult homeschooling parents find the process of determining what their children need to learn so that they will be adequately prepared for their future lives. Not all parents agree on what high school students need to learn in order to be prepared for college-level writing. However, these discussions show how non-specialist writing instructors often view their teaching: as a set of things their students need to learn that are influenced not just by their beliefs about what they want to teach but also by what they think they have to teach (and, in the case of college writing instructors in writing programs, often what they must teach according to writing program guidelines). Discussions with other teachers and with composition scholars can positively inform non-specialists' teaching

practices by helping them understand what other writing instructors are teaching and why, national and local standards for writing instruction that inform their courses, and different writing experiences at home and at work that students may encounter in their lives after college.

Homeschooling parents, like other teachers, develop writing instruction based on these competing tensions. The negotiations between private and public interests in writing instruction are more complicated for non-specialists such as homeschooling parents because they aren't as aware of public ideas about what writing instruction should look like.<sup>140</sup> These navigations are additionally complicated because homeschooling parents usually identify themselves as part of a counterpublic which has rejected American society's ideas about schooling. Although parents are heavily invested in their own educational philosophies and values, which often lead them to homeschool their children, they are simultaneously invested in the cultural capital that their students can gain through certain writing skills. These skills include those taught by both parents and curricula – such as the “basic skills” Carroll claims she teaches her children that will be enough to prepare them for college writing instruction – and those provided through outsourcing. As parents on these forums try to collectively determine how to teach writing and to construct an imagined version of writing instruction that is valued in the public sphere, disagreements and conflicting advice reveal the complexities of negotiating these concerns.

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<sup>140</sup> For non-specialist writing instructors teaching in college writing programs, similar gaps are found in their lack of awareness about current composition scholarship, including best practices in writing instruction.

As parents have to negotiate these concerns, their investments in their children's futures not just as teachers but as parents complicates the decisions they make about writing instruction. They are concerned not just with the impact of their decisions on students' lives for a year or semester but with the impact of their decisions on students' entire lives, much of which they presumably will witness. Their careful weighing of what to teach their students encourages all writing teachers to remember that what we do in our classrooms has far-reaching impacts on students that we likely will not observe. Just because we do not witness these outcomes does not mean that they are not important. Homeschooling parents' discussions about how to best prepare their children with specific writing skills emphasizes the importance of the decisions all teachers make and the importance of our concern for the long-term as well as short-term outcomes of these decisions.

## CHAPTER V

### LITERACY TEACHERS IN HOME/SCHOOL SPACES

At the beginning of the last chapter, I briefly discussed a hostile conversation between a public school student, laserprecision, and several homeschooling parents on *Homeschool.com*. I return to this thread in greater depth here because it illustrates some of the assumptions homeschoolers and those from traditional schools often make about each other, revealing some of the tensions homeschooling parents feel between personal and social aspects of schooling. This thread begins with a user, Charlotte1832's, question about homeschoolers' schedules: "I'm just wondering what a typical day is like for most highschoolers? What time does your highschool homeschooler start their day, how much schoolwork do they do?" ("New to HS"). One user, hrtmom, responds with a quite detailed answer to these questions, which Charlotte1832 thanks her for and then posts in-depth about her own son's schedule and curriculum. Their discussion already involves personal decisions about workload and scheduling as well as Charlotte1832's social concern with how the work her son is doing matches up with what others are doing. At this point, laserprecision steps in with his first post:

Here was my typical schedule at a public hs:  
8-230: class  
230-530: tennis

6-7: tutored privately

7-8: hw

8-midnight: hung out with friends

Of course, that all changed when I started working, but that gives you a rough idea. I loved the freedom and benefited socially and gave me great time-management skills. (“New to HS”)

Laserprecision responds as the other users have, providing his own schedule. Notably, he was not homeschooled, so his entry into this discussion marks a point at which this counterpublic is invaded by an outside presence. As I discuss in chapter four, neither Farmer nor Fraser discuss the boundaries around counterpublics, but it is clear from this conversation that homeschoolers have a difficult time allowing outsiders access into their community. One reason is that they see their own navigations of personal and social issues in education as a unique dilemma that others have difficulty understanding because they are not involved in the many decisions homeschooling parent-teachers have to make about their children’s education.

One anonymous user, Guest, antagonistically responds, “Hmm... Tennis? Private tutoring? That’s wonderful. I’m glad you enjoyed public school. However, I wonder if there are skills even you are lacking. Should I name a few or should we see if you could come up with them yourself?” (“New to HS”). The sarcastic “That’s wonderful” points out what this user assumes is laserprecision’s privileged status. Guest does not discuss the schedule, laserprecision’s actual contribution to the thread that provides an interesting contrast to homeschooled children’s schedules. Instead, he or she initially comments on laserprecision’s socioeconomic status, which is a sticking point with homeschooling parents who sometimes feel that the only option they can afford besides public schooling



is homeschooling. For example, the 2007 NCES study I discuss in chapter one claims that 40% of homeschooling households have an income under \$50,000, not enough to send one or more children to private schools. Guest further adds that the public school system has flaws that are unacknowledged by laserprecision, an important point because perceived or actual problems feed homeschooling parents' desire to homeschool their children, especially if their economic situation prevents enrolling their children in private schools. Another user, su\_ju, steps in and adds to this attack:

What about the "20 min of studying including hw" that you mentioned in the teen forum?? And you hung out with your friends from 8 to midnight??!! I know what I did when I spent that much time with friends, and it wasn't good! What about your family? Didn't you do anything with them? Homeschooling families tend to highly value family time and relationships. I hope you do find some homeschool grads, because you will find them to be normal, healthy individuals. ("New to HS")

The central problem su\_ju has with laserprecision is that he spent so much time with friends and apparently little time with family. Because homeschooling parents value family so much, especially since they identify the home as an important site of education, children's movement out of the home is seen as detrimental – or not “good” – to the health of both the family and individuals, whose wellbeing is tied to their familial relationships. The dual roles family members have as parents and teachers, children and students complicates homeschooling parents' understanding of family and school; others, such as laserprecision, see these as separate things whereas homeschooling parents see them as one and the same. Many homeschooling parents have a difficult time discussing school without discussing family and vice versa. Laserprecision's time spent outside of

the home (both at school and with friends) is perceived as a threat to the worldview that most homeschooling parents uphold through their decisions about both family and school. Su\_ju assumes that parents who send their children to public schools and children who attend public schools do not value family. In sum, su\_ju builds on Guest's attack of laserprecision and makes many assumptions about his life.

In the next post, laserprecision defends himself: "I already mentioned hw at 7-8...did you really want a detailed breakdown even more than that? I had plenty of time to hang out with my family on the weekends. We all have busy schedules during the week so weekdays aren't an option. As for hanging out from 8-12, it's more of a cultural thing really....the social life really opens up at night" ("New to HS"). Laserprecision answers su\_ju's main problems with his schedule, pointing out when he spends time with family and why he hangs out with friends so late. In other words, he attempts to dispel the idea that children who attend public school don't have close ties to family. Guest (it isn't clear if this is the same guest as before or someone else, although it seems to be the same user) writes a longer post about the proper protocols for forum posts that I discuss at the opening to fourth chapter. Another user, erialicia, then makes much larger assumptions about laserprecision's life:

Allowing a highschool student to be out till midnight every single night is plain wrong...obviously this laser person lacked family at home....parents probably worked 2 full time jobs and used tennis and private tutors basically as baby sitters....I could not imagine only having family time on weekends....that's too bad you had that type of family life.... ("New to HS")

This attack on laserprecision's home life jumps to many unfounded conclusions about his home life based only on the schedule that laserprecision provides and his previous post on the thread. Guest more explicitly spells out the assumptions homeschooling parents may make about families whose children attend public schools, particularly in relation to both parents working. This comment in particular speaks to the gendered nature of homeschooling; although some fathers may stay at home to homeschool, more often it is mothers who choose not to work so that they can homeschool their children (see discussion of working mothers in the first chapter).<sup>141</sup> The assumptions found in Guest's post reflect his or her beliefs about the roles parents should take and the values they should have about prioritizing family over work.

Laserprecision's next post becomes more hostile: "Actually my father is retired (chairman of the board) and my mother is an artist. Yes, I bet that's the equivalent of two full-time jobs for you. I never had a tutor. Actually, I WAS the tutor for kids in my area. Also, I'm very close to my parents. So thanks for playing but you've struck out" ("New to HS"). Again, laserprecision answers erialicia's assumptions, correcting them while also jabbing at homeschoolers' resistance to one parent having a job with the phrase, "I

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<sup>141</sup> This may lead people to assume that homeschooling is an anti-feminist movement. In reality, homeschooling mothers find the ability to educate their own children a powerful assertion of their role in their families and in society. In my research, I have found no evidence to support the idea that men insist their wives homeschool their children. Instead, I have more often read accounts from women who want to homeschool but whose husbands are hesitant, most often because they are unsure about removing their children from school. Homeschooling mothers, it seems, are more likely initially to buck public opinion and turn to homeschooling as a valid educational alternative, perhaps because they are already inclined to stay at home to raise their children. More research is needed to explore women's roles in decisions to homeschool, especially the rhetorical strategies that influence them and that they employ in making this decision.

bet that's the equivalent of two full-time jobs for you." Another user, justcardi, replies, "Thank you for the clarification. It makes no difference. It doesn't change our feelings toward you . . . P.S. You struck out first" ("New to HS"). It is obvious that the homeschooling parents on this thread feel threatened by laserprecision, particularly his insistence that he has a good family relationship even though he attended public school. These parents seem angry at his interruption of their discussion, perhaps because he has forced them to consider that homeschoolers are not the only families with good relationships and that public school does not necessarily ruin people's lives. Justcardi also adds in the next post in reply to laserprecision's comment that he or she bets his parents' jobs are "the equivalent of two full-time jobs for you," "Wow, you really are an...never mind. I'm done. You're...just ignorant!!!" ("New to HS"). Their reaction to laserprecision is to question his life and eventually to insult him as they attempt to protect the values found in this counterpublic and the idea that these are unique to them.

The conversation isn't quite done for justcardi yet, however. He or she writes a quite long post talking about assumptions he or she thinks laserprecision has made in response to a post that laserprecision deletes (and that is, thus, not recorded as part of this thread):

Laser, WHAT?? I made no assumptions about you that was not based on what you said . . . You have made more assumptions than anyone on here. You assume that we pulled our children out of school because of bullies. You've assumed that we have a problem with the public schools. You've assumed that we are over protective. You've assumed that we are all mothers. You've assumed that we had a tough time in highschool . . . You assumed that we are unable to provide our children with a proper education. You assumed that our children cannot go to college, especially the you you [sic] supposedly go to. You assume that everyone wants to go to college. You assume that all public school students will have the

opportunity to go to college. You have made a LOT of assumptions. (“New to HS”)

In this post, justcardi fails to acknowledge the assumptions that were made very clearly about laserprecision and his home life earlier in the thread. Instead, justcardi spends most of the post discussing some of the assumptions he or she thinks laserprecision has made about homeschoolers. This may respond directly to laserprecision’s deleted post, but it also diverts attention away from the attacks made on him and the reasons for his defensiveness. Justcardi also mentions that laserprecision assumes homeschooling parents “have a problem with the public schools.” Even if homeschooling parents don’t have a problem with public education generally, their decision to homeschool makes it clear that they at least had a problem with the public schools their own children would attend and/or with the changed family dynamics that result when children spend much time out of home and in school. Su\_ju interjects again, “There is no better way to make enemies with parents than for someone without kids to criticize their parenting. That is why you have raised so many hackles here. You don’t know us, our situations, our children, our abilities, our resources, etc, etc. Lay down your admittedly uneducated assumptions. You may learn something new” (“New to HS”). Su\_ju claims that users have trouble with laserprecision because he is critiquing their parenting, which often involves personal decisions about family and child development. In reality, this thread shows that most users seem to have trouble with laserprecision and his family’s lifestyle, an ironic critique given homeschoolers’ atypical educational choices and open attitude towards all kinds of homeschoolers seen in other threads. Homeschooling parents, in

protecting the counterpublic they have constructed that includes particular assumptions about schooling and family life, have difficulty allowing alternative viewpoints into this community because their decisions rest in part on the belief that homeschooling offers their children unique connections to family. People such as laserprecision illustrate other ways families can be successfully built that don't rely on homeschooling.

Laserprecision then jumps in with his final post on this thread:

From reading the boards, it seems like very many pull their children out because they're having "problems" at school, hate the "liberal brainwashing," or "don't want to expose them to the horrible experience that is high school that I once had, heaven forbid they see people doing DRUGS or experience PEER PRESSURE." I've read almost every thread on many of the board's sections and that's just simply the impression that I get. And yes, I assume that the great majority of you are mothers . . . I see posts where parents are struggling to teach Algebra I and that in my eyes means that they are not fit to teach. From reading the boards, it seems most encounter difficulty getting into ivies and some jump straight into jobs. I don't assume everyone wants to go to college, so thanks for putting words into my mouth. And yes, I do assume that all public school students will have the opportunity to go to college, given that they're not complete failures and have the resources (time, mostly) to do so. ("New to HS")

Laserprecision once again answers the problems other users have with his posts, pointing out that most of his assumptions spring from what he has read on the forum's threads.

Some of the assumptions he makes are clearly incorrect, particularly the idea that "all public school students will have the opportunity to go to college" and that those who don't are either "complete failures" or don't have time. This comment supports the assumption that laserprecision has lead a privileged life; lack of resources is not even mentioned as a possibility that public school students or others aren't able to go to college, especially Ivy League universities. At this point, a truce is called by justcardi and

the thread ends. Such a heated argument, however, contradicts the friendly tone typically found on *Homeschool.com* forums and points to the tensions between personal and public decisions that underlie the assumptions homeschoolers and those traditionally schooled make about each other.

Homeschooling parents do not find it easy to navigate these tensions as has been visible throughout this project, especially when they feel that their decisions are in question as the users talking to laserprecision feel. Homeschooling parents utilize writing curricula and find options such as co-ops to provide the best writing instruction they can to their students. Laserprecision recognizes homeschooling parents' posts as evidence in the failures of home education; instead, they are evidence that homeschoolers struggle with some of the same questions educators in public and private schools do, even as they additionally struggle with their lack of knowledge about particular subjects such as writing. These include questions about what kinds of curricula can best teach students and how to prepare students for the college writing that they will be expected to do, even as teachers, including some homeschooling parents, contend with state and national standards that govern what and how they teach. Depending on the state they reside in, homeschooling parents undoubtedly have more freedom than public or private school teachers to conform teaching to individual students. The larger concerns they have reveal, nevertheless, similar issues as traditional English teachers. Homeschooling parents, like other teachers, want to prepare their students for success in their futures, particularly if they go to college. Reconciling this need with their own lack of understanding about college writing expectations and their personal beliefs about education can be difficult,

especially since they are non-specialists who are largely unfamiliar with high school and college-level writing. Studies have shown that homeschooling students generally transition well to postsecondary institutions and the expectations that are placed upon them once they graduate high school.<sup>142</sup> Despite this evidence and anecdotal evidence from parents whose children have successfully gone to college, homeschooling parents are still very anxious about providing adequate writing instruction to their children. Utilizing specific writing curricula, enrolling their children in co-ops, and talking to other homeschooling parents only partially alleviates these worries as they attempt to imaginatively construct what their children need to learn.

My project, by examining how homeschooling parents try to juggle a myriad of expectations from themselves and external forces (including state homeschooling requirements), illustrates what many writing teachers juggle as we make pedagogical decisions. Whenever a teacher decides how to teach writing, he or she makes decisions about texts, assignments, teaching style, and students' short-term and long-term needs that are influenced by external expectations from a school, a writing program, other teachers, and students. What can be lost in the midst of these decisions are larger questions that Kunzman poses as central to education but often ignored in traditional schools: "What are the central purposes of education? What kind of person do I want my child [or student] to become? How can I make her learning experience the best it can be?" (12). Furthermore, as my examination of homeschooling parents shows, the values of writing teachers – not just about education but about the structure of society, including

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<sup>142</sup> See Lattibeaudiere; Bolle, Wessel, and Mulvihill; Foster; White et al.; Sutton and Galloway; Jones and Gloeckner; Jenkins.



family – inform pedagogical decisions. Writing teachers, particularly non-specialist instructors less familiar with current composition scholarship, need to examine how we make decisions so we can interrogate our own perspectives about writing instruction and offer students instruction best suited to their uses of writing in the present and in the (imagined) future. Engaging writing instructors in explicit discussions about our programmatic and individual assumptions about writing, including where our own values stem from, is a necessary aspect of teacher preparation. Without regular introspection, writing instructors can lose sight of why they teach writing as they do and what the short-term and long-term effects of this instruction may be on students.

In addition to considering the outcomes of this project in such programmatic terms, my examination of homeschooling parents' decisions about writing instruction also reveals the complicated connections between home and school spaces, especially when schooling occurs outside of the home. The growth of online instruction at all levels increases the urgency for teachers and scholars to examine how complicated writing instruction becomes when it occurs in spaces that are simultaneously home and school. Online instruction moves the site of writing instruction out of the institution and into students' homes, offices, coffee shops, and anywhere else with an Internet connection. We need to better understand how this movement of writing instruction shifts the negotiations between home and school literacies. If students learn in home spaces, their home literacies will likely influence their writing instruction more than in face-to-face classrooms, particularly given the number of distractions online students deal with, as homeschooling parents whose children take online courses sometimes discuss. The

blurring between home and school can be seen in the ways homeschooling parents' personal beliefs about family, religion, and schooling influence their decisions about writing instruction. As online writing courses and writing MOOCs<sup>143</sup> become increasingly popular, my project shows that when writing instruction occurs in the home, personal concerns influence the instruction offered and received there more than in traditional schooling situations. Students in online writing courses, especially when taken as part of online degree programs, are not given as much guidance about what writing instruction is expected to prepare them for and why, which can lead to confusion or even apathy about this instruction. More attention to educating online writing students about a writing course's expectations and justifications for these can be a useful step in helping students understand and become invested in the education offered. Individual instructors understanding these things themselves is, of course, a necessary precursor to this step and to building programmatic cohesion and a program that is suited to a writing particular student population.

The entwined nature of personal and social concerns homeschooling parents feel pressuring them to offer their children particular kinds of writing instruction illustrates the difficulty of negotiating tensions surrounding literacies. In an increasingly wired world, where students come to face-to-face classes and text their friends and where teachers can offer writing instruction to students across the globe, the literacies we use are less and less divided. Homeschoolers teach in spaces that are simultaneously home

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<sup>143</sup> Massive Open Online Course. Several first-year composition MOOCs have recently been offered; Duke's "English Composition I: Achieving Expertise" taught by Denise Comer is perhaps the most discussed. See Krause and Rice for discussions of their experiences taking a MOOC.

and school, just as many people learn in spaces that are neither completely one or the other. Technologies bring together these spaces and the literacies used in them, which is reflected in abbreviated text messaging language sneaking into formal academic essays and specialized jargon appearing on Facebook and in Tweets. Rarely are spaces either academic *or* everyday, public *or* private. Instead, we must reconceive of our lives occurring in one sphere, encompassing public and private decisions, ideas, and lived experiences. Moving towards a model that views the private and public as always overlapping more accurately accounts for the ways we live our lives and furthers our ability to examine *how* these overlaps occur, why, and for what purpose. It also forces more attention to the rhetorical decisions people must make as they navigate this complex space.

Similarly, literacies cannot be segregated into either/or categories. Instead, just as homeschooling parents constantly negotiate private and public concerns in their children's writing instruction, people must negotiate the many uses of language that we have available to use every day, sometimes simultaneously. When I feel the impulse to use "y'all" in scholarship and have to catch myself with a reminder that this is a both regional term and informal, choosing instead "all of you," I'm negotiating the various literacies that I have available to me to make decisions that will influence my audience most positively. This is a complicated process, involving increasingly difficult decisions about rhetorical dexterity and language use. Everyone, including writing students, will find rhetorical dexterity increasingly important as we make decisions in this one, overlapping space in which many linguistic options are available. We need to understand

the process by which people can and do make linguistic decisions in this sphere because technology shows signs of making such overlaps more, not less, pervasive. Also important is the knowledge that writers have to shift the literacies they use, but they do not “lose” literacies. “Y’all” never disappears but, instead, is lurking in the background regardless of whether readers are aware of it. I am aware of it, and as a writer, the individual negotiation of language and what it means for the ways I use language are what matter.

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## APPENDIX A

### POPULAR HOMESCHOOL WRITING CURRICULA

<b>Name</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Source</b>
Bandusia Tutorials	Online, College-Style Courses in Literature and Writing	HSLDA
Brave Writer	Online Courses and <i>The Writer's Jungle</i> Curricula Supplement	HSLDA, Cathy Duffy, Home School Curriculum Advisor, Secular Homeschool
Classical Writing	Comprehensive Curricula	HSLDA, Cathy Duffy
Institute for Excellence in Writing	Comprehensive Curricula, partially computer-based	HSLDA, Cathy Duffy, Home School Curriculum Advisor, HomeSchool Reviews, Homeschool Spot, School House Review Crew
Write at Home	Comprehensive Curricula, partially online	HSLDA, Home School Curriculum Advisor, HomeSchool Reviews
Writing Strands	Comprehensive Curricula, Workbook Format	HSLDA, Home School Curriculum Advisor, HomeSchool Reviews, Homeschool Spot
Write Guide	Writing Consultant Service	HSLDA, HomeSchool Reviews
Patrick Henry Writing Mentors	Supplemental	HSLDA
Time4Writing.com	Supplemental	HSLDA, Secular Homeschool, School House Review Crew
Understanding Writing	Comprehensive but Not Intense	Cathy Duffy, HomeSchool Reviews
WriteShop	Comprehensive with Limited Number of Lessons	Cathy Duffy, Home School Curriculum Advisor, HomeSchool Reviews, School House Review Crew
Writing for 100 Days and Fairview's Guide to	Comprehensive, Meant for Groups	Cathy Duffy

Composition and Essay Writing		
A Beka Language Curriculum	Comprehensive Curricula	Cathy Duffy, HomeSchool Reviews (bad)
Michael Clay Thompson Language Arts	Comprehensive Curricula, Classical Base	Cathy Duffy
Building Christian English Series	Comprehensive Curricula, Biblical Approach, Grammar	Cathy Duffy
Sonlight	Comprehensive Curricula, Uses a Variety of Books	Home School Curriculum Advisor, HomeSchool Reviews, Secular Homeschool, School House Review Crew
WriteSource/Writer's Inc.	Supplemental	Home School Curriculum Advisor, HomeSchool Reviews
Calvert	Comprehensive Curricula	HomeSchool Reviews, Secular Homeschool
Essentials in Writing		Homeschool Spot